THE DRAMATIC WORLD OF JOHN WEBSTER

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BY

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Certified that the M.Phil thesis, entitled "The Dramatic World of John Webster" by Mr. Mukesh Kumar Sharma, was completed under my supervision. To the best of my knowledge the work has been done by the candidate.

(Professor K.S. Misra)
Supervisor.

C O N T E N T S

P R E F A C E

John Webster has generally been studied in the context of the theatrical conventions of his time. Besides this, many a critc have been contented with analysing the poetry of his plays. After a relative neglect of Webster for more than a century the Romantic critics tried to explore the deeper psychological layers of Webster's characters. Theatrical critics like William Archer, have concentrated on the positive and negative points of the structure of Webster's plays. The neo-humanist critics found Webster lacking in any unifying moral vision in his plays. With the popularity of formalistic criticism from the thirties onwards of the present century heavy concentration is discernable in Webster criticism on the study of his language and imagery, where Webster's detracters have tried to shwo his laboured artistry in the use of language and imagery and prove the lack of any originality in him. The more significant stance taken by Webster scholars has been their disappointment with Webster on account of his presentation of a centreless world.

The present study seeks to dispell the general critical evaluation of Webster's status as a dramatist through an analysis of his two major, uncollaborated plays to determine that the lack of a unifying moral vision in his plays was not fault of the dramatist's artistry but a logical corollary of the perspective of human life which characterised the close of the reign of Queen Elizabeth. In his own words Webster has "erred deliberately and not ignorantly" in presenting a morally anarchical world. The analysis of Webster's two plays -- The White Devil and The Duchess of Malfi -- is aimed at showing that the gloomy picture of the world that he has drawn in his plays is a deliberate choice which also

justifies his satirical technique.

The study is devided into four sections. The first section-- Introduction -- gives briefly a picture of the world which constituted Webster's corpus. It also mentions influences on Webster and the dramatic conventions that he selected for use in his plays. It gives an overview of Webster's criticism from the 17th century to our own times. Chapter two and three contain a detailed analysis of his two major plays -- The White Devil and The Duchess of Malfi. The other play which is included in a typical Webster collection of plays - The Devil's Law Case -- has not been included in the present study. The reason for this is that this is a play written in collaboration and its inclusion would have perhaps necessiated the consideration of a number of such other collaborated plays. Besides this, the constraint of space was another factor, though of a minor nature. The final section -- Conclusion- is a statement about the picture of the world which emerges from the analysis of the two plays as well as a recapitulation of the significant points about Webster's dramaturgy which emerged from the discussion of the two plays. Finally, a selected bibliography of the materials perused has been given.

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C H A P T E R I

I N T R O D U C T I O N

John Webster is one of the most important Jacobean dramatists. But not much details about his personal life are available to scholars. Though we know much about his father, the facts available about the dramatist himself are not yet quite confirmed. Biographical researchers, like Mary Edmond,[1] who have done work on Webster's life, have tentatively agreed upon the period between 1579-1582 as the possible time when Webster must have been born. No proof is available about his academic career. Generally it has been acknowledged that Webster had had a grammar school education.[2] Though the view that he attended the Merchant Taylor's Company's school is not finally settled, his association with the school is deduced from his admiration for those who had had their schooling there. The fact that he had had grammar school education leads us to the assumption that he must have had adequate reading in classical and contemporary literature. Works of classical dramatists, like Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, Aristophanes, Seneca, Terence, and Plautus, were easily available in translation by Webster's time. Like other dramatists of his time, Webster, too, derived his dramatic inspiration from the classical models, which intermingled with the native traditions. Besides this, we notice that as a typical grammar school student, Webster had the capacity to learn things by heart. In his plays the use of imagery, anecdotes, maxims, proverbs, and

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1. For full details see Mary Edmond, "In Search of John Webster" in Times Literary Supplement, 24 December, 1976.
2. See M.C. Bradbrook, "The Middle Temple" in John Webster: Citizen and Dramatist (Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1980), pp.28-29.

such other expressions, are considered to be the characteristics of the background of the education he had had. Webster's writings clearly show the contemporary influence of the University Wits, of Shakespeare, and Ben Jonson. He was more influenced by Ben Jonson and Chapman then by any other dramatist of that period. Next to Ben Jonson and Chapman comes Christopher Marlowe whom he followed in a number of ways. From these writers Webster adopted the technique of ironic detachment, and satirical whipping in his exploration of the contemporary evil.[3] Webster's satiric reaction to the milieu in which he lived is the continuation of the same period as Marlowe's, which runs through Jonson to the end of the Augustan period. This satiric edge also owes its origin to the classical sources. Webster's fascination for death and horror can be accredited to his readings of both Kyd and Seneca. Like the other Elizabethans and Jacobeans Webster was also influenced by the Italian philosopher, Machiavelli, and like them, he, too, had interpreted Machiavelli to suit his dramatic purpose of projecting a particular vision of life. Machiavelli was conceived by the Elizabethans in the image of a ruthless opportunist and a callous seeker after preferment, for whom end justified the means. His philosophy of diplomacy and pragmatism in public dealings was relatively ignored and misrepresented as an evil weapon for grabbing authority and of self-aggrandisement. His concepts, and views were explicated and discussed only among a small group of élites and their nature was unknown to the average

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3. G.K. and S.K. Hunter, "Introduction" in John Webster (Penguin, Middlesex, 1969), pp.20-22.

theatre-goer. The distorted policies of pragmatic opportunism were adopted even by Queen Elizabeth and later by James I in the affairs and conduct of the State, and had coloured the entire ethos of people in all walks of life. Machiavelli was caricatured, sometimes eulogised and very often symbolically realised in images of cynicism, melancholy, and despair. All travestied values — moral, social, familial, and religious — were accredited to this reigning deity of the period. He became a convenient metaphor for the Jacobeans to explore the nature of evil in contemporary life. The Machiavellian philosophy, which was exploited in the presentation of life's dark side as a counter to the complacent image of man created in the image of God, must have lent strength to the popularity of Machiavellianism. It is useful to have a critical look at some of the significant aspects of life and society during the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods, which shaped Webster's imagination and acted as a source for his dramatic material.

It is a common knowledge of the student of this period that the reign of Queen Elizabeth had provided a sense of security and stability after a prolonged spate of civil strife and fight for the throne. The earlier political feuds and machinations of the feudal lords seemed now to have yielded to an era of calm and prosperity. Besides the political calm, economic prosperity had started making new strides.[4] It is a common knowledge of the students of history

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4. For a detailed and precise account see L.C. Knights, "The Development of Capitalist Enterprise," in Drama and Society in the Age of Jonson (Chatto & Windus, London, 1962), pp.30-96.

that explorations of new lands were undertaken during this period. Adventurous voyagers moved out of England and went to distant places for trade and commerce. Scientific discoveries were added to the new economic prosperity.[5] It was during this period that the British navy defeated the hitherto invincible Spanish Armada. This brought added confidence in the minds of the people. The literature of the early Elizabethan age naturally expressed this new faith in "vitality, worship of the glorious processes of life, an expansion and elation of mind which corresponds directly to the upward movement of prosperous and expanding society."[6] It is well to remember here that besides pride and confidence in the nation's sure path of upward movement, the revival of classical learning and the Renaissance humanistic thinking also contributed substantially to man's newly acquired faith in his individualism and being created in the image of God. Man was naturally filled with high-soaring aspirations for higher and higher movement. These aspirations are reflected both in literature and art. Michael Angelo's fascination for flight in his paintings is an example of this aspect of life in art. Marlowe's Tamburlaine, Dr. Faustus, Young Mortimer, and the Guise are examples of unbridled aspirations in literature. But with this upward movement, another paradoxical perception is juxtaposed by writers like Marlowe, who pointed in the early phase of this period

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5. Ibid., pp.98-108.
   Also see G.M. Trevelyan, English Social History (Longmans, London, 1946), pp. 173-205.

6. Una Ellis-Fermor, The Jacobean Drama (Methuen, London,1973), p.1.

towards a sense of defeat implicit in the very aspirations. All Marlowe's heroes, for example, trying to overreach themselves, are defeated. But this is not to say that the brilliance of the aspirations is in any way diminished. But the individuals embodying unbridled aspirations are warned against their attempts of transcendence of their human limitations. It is this realisation by perceptive writers, like Marlowe, of the inherent human limitations, which breeds the mood of despair in the otherwise generally resplendent atmosphere. E.M.W. Tillyard has perceptively remarked in this regard: "Though there were various new things in the Elizabethan age to make life exciting the old struggle between the claims of two worlds still persisted."[7]

With the death of Elizabeth and the accession of James I, this mood of despair was reinforced more effectively by the disillusionment resulting from the revival of the sense of uncertainty and instability which had started showing in the political and social life. The causes for this mood of depression are not far to seek. The memory of the last accessions of Henry VIII, Edward, and Mary Queen of Scotts, and the various conspiracies to assassinate Elizabeth combined with the problem of an obvious heir, was too fresh to be ignored. There were a number of probable successors to succeed Elizabeth. Hence the situation was threatening to be that of a civil war. In spite of the defeat of the Spanish Armada, the possibility of fresh Spanish attacks was too true to be covered up by any superficial complacency.

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7. The Elizabethan World Picture (Penguin, Middlesex, 1970), p.14.

The situation became worse with the open rebellion of Essex who was eventually executed. The fall of such a brilliant and great person created bitterness among the people who were mostly with him. However, the accession of James I, without any bloodshed, brought a sense of relief and stability. But soon after this the unpopularity of James, the corruption, lowering of standards, slackness of discipline, loss of dignity, and increase in expending, at the court,[8] deepened the uncertainty in the minds of the people. Here too, plots were conspired against James, like the Gunpowder plot in 1605 which was aimed at him and his Parliament with all its machinery. The plays of the years between 1600-1612 reflect all these things in one form or another. There runs through all these plays, "besides the sense of spiritual emptiness or fear, a growing tendency to hold more closely to the evidence of the senses and of practical experience, to limit knowledge to non-spiritual world of man and his relation with man."[9] The comedy of the day concentrates upon manners, habits, and morals of man as social and non-spiritual animal while tragedy "becomes satanic revealing a world-order of evil power,... bewildered and confused."[10]

The drama of the early phase represents events and actions of the outer life and reflection and thought of the inner feelings

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8. G.E. Aylmer, The Struggle for the Constitution (Blend Ford Press, London, 1963), p. 30.
   See Also G.M. Trevelyan, History of England Vol. II (Doubleday & Company, New York, 1952), p.155; and
   Harluz G. Barker, "The National Background" in A Companion to Shakespearean Studies(Cambridge Univ. Press, London, 1962),p.184.
9. U.Ellis Fermor, Jacobean Drama, p.4.
10. Ibid.

of life. Here generally the subject mater is taken from the events of war, romantic fairy tales, and from mythical stories and saga of love. In it is represented not so much the actual life of the day as the desires of the audience. The instinct for horrors or bloodshed is quenched simply, lustily, childishly; even the plays, like The Spanish Tragedy, The Battle of Alcazar, The Massacre at Paris, Arden of Feversham, and The Yorkshire Tragedy, are not the average presentation of the daily life of the day. Love for patriotism and nationalism is presented through a long series of plays from Peele's Edward I through Henry V to the Arraignment of Paris. People's eagerness with foreign politics and the politics at home is given account in the chronicles and historical plays of Shakespeare , Greene, Marlowe, and Peele, exhibiting the contemporary government's problems with the past, and nature of kingship. Besides these plays of event, action, fantasy, and romance, myth of Lyly, delicate joy and humour of Peele, and the tenderness of Greene, are the other qualities of the drama of this period presented in certain plays. Throughout the drama of this phase are "scattered the reflections of speculative thought carried out in the same mood of bold exploration... but never with more depth of implication than in Tamburlaine and Faustus."[11]

We notice a kind of development in the second phase of the Elizabethan drama. It was not the development of the dramatist's personal vision, but the development in the social, economic, theatrical, and moral fields. "Shakespeare's progress from Romeo and Juliet to King Lear was not a personal development but a

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11. Ibid., p.6.

development of the system of the society."[12] The dramatist reacted against the routine of this system and shaped it in his works. In fact the greatness of the drama of this period is not due to the emergence of a single factor but "due to the bringing together and lively interplay of many important contemporary interests. If Marlowe 'gets into blank verse, the melody of Spenser', the satirists and epigramatists -- Hall, Marston, Donne, Rowlands... focus attention on the familiar world... the religious controversy reinforces the already popular demand for moral instruction."[13] Drama of this period differs from the other forms of literature, particularly the poetry, in the sense that poetry does not deal with the contemporary social thoughts, feelings and changes.[14] But in the drama of the period we find the reflection of the contemporary social, ethical, and moral changes in the society.

As we have already mentioned that the target of the early Elizabethan playwrights was the war and the historical events of the country, the target of the dramatists of this period was the new system taking place in the society. However, the target was not against the whole system, but against the individuals who were helping to form that system, saying that "they were obeying the laws of supply and demand." Thus the satires on the new order

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12. L.C. Knights, Drama and Society in the Age of Jonson, p.172.

13. Ibid.

14. Though John Donne and Spenser have given some political allusions, they are allegorical and are connected with the actual world only remotely.

took the form of attack on these individuals. Here "the diagnosis was moral rather than economic."[15]

During the early years of the reign of James I a particular kind of taste was generated in the theatre. Here the theatrical activities were deeply affected by the religious controversy between the Puritans and the Catholics. During this period the theatres were the 'haunts' of the courtiers, because the major portion of the society which was in favour of the Puritans and against the King , stopped visiting theatres, because they believed that "the cause of plagues was sin, if you look to it well: and the cause of sin are plays: therefore the cause of plague are the plays."[16] The courtiers liked greater entertainments in the theatres, because they were habitual of it at the court. As the dramatist had to please them, he had to "keep them stimulated by a continual series of thrilling events."[17] The audience's love for thrilling events was not necessarily throughout the play but "at stress-positions within the play."[18]

The plays of this period are generally characterized "With their court setting, their pervasive atmosphere of idealism and corruption, and their ambivalent finales."[19] The contemporary issues have been dealt with frequently on the Jacobean stage: the recent political disturbances in France, in Chapman's Bussy plays; the

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15. L.C. Knights, Drama and Society in the Age of Jonson, p.176.
16. F.P. Wilson, "Elizabethan and Jacobean" in Ralph J. Kaufman ed., Elizabethan Drama: Modern Essays in Criticism (Oxford Uni. Press, New York, 1961), p.8.
17. Allardyce Nicoll, The British Drama (George G. Harrap & Co., London, 1967), p.111.
18. Ibid.
19. J.W. Lever, The Tragedy of State (Methuen, London, 1971), p.2.

dramatization of the Roman history in Jonson's Sejanus and Chapman's Caesar and Pompey; the court intrigues in the plays of Marston, Tourneur, and Webster etc. Besides these issues, "the serious playwrights of the age were aware of a wider transformation of society taking place throughout Europe and undermining all traditional human relationships, which consisted in the growth and concentration of state power, the destruction of the Italian city republics, the conversion of English, French and Spanish noblemen into court parasites, the absorption of petty despotism by great monarchies, and the concomitant suppression of a wide range of individual freedoms."[20]

In fact what the drama of the Jacobean period does is that "it reflects the uncertainty of an age no longer able to believe in the old ideals, searching almost frantically for new ones to replace them, but incapable yet of finding them."[21] If we look at the final plays of this period, we notice that they all "reveal a world in which man may be destroyed by evils which are the inevitable concomitants of those very virtues which make him great, and in which the lust of Antony or the pride of Coriolanus... may have an heroic quality to which we cannot help but give our emotional acquiescence while we recognize the corruption of the divine order from which it sprang and its utter sinfulness in terms of traditional morality."[22] It was Webster who continued the ironic-satiric tradition of Marlowe through plays which had direct relevance to the immediate milieu briefly summarised above.

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20. Ibid., p.4.
21. Irving Ribner, The Jacobean Tragedy (Methuen, London, 1972), pp.2-3.
22. Ibid., p.3.

Webster has been approached variously right from the time when his first independent play The White Devil, acted by the Queen's Men at the Red Bull, came out. It was approached as a "true imitation of life," and was both criticised and praised for that. There was another approach to his plays where his "subtle poetry" was held in high esteem. This is clear from Webster's own reaction to the audience's lack of appreciation of The White Devil. He calls them 'asses', though he admits that the play was badly performed because of physical and climatic reasons.[23] His next play, The Duchess of Malfi, which was printed in 1623, was objected to first by a Venetion envoy for religious reasons in 1618. Its printing in 1623 is an indication of the dramatist's reputation. Webster's reputation is further indicated by Henry Fitzjeffery's(1617) mention of him in his Notes from Blackfriars. Webster's power in the field of tragedy declined soon after his two great plays. His next play The Devil's Law Case is a "less challenging play of episodic structure belonging to 1616-1620."[24] But Webster did not stay here, we meet him again in 1624 in A Late Murder of the Son upon the Mother, with John Ford. The process was continued till his next recorded work Appius and Virginia came in the thirties of the seventeenth century. In the declined attitude it reflects the same process of simplification and thinner texture, after the two great plays. After

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23. For details see Elizabeth M. Brennan, "An Understanding Auditory: an Audience for John Webster " in Brian Morris, ed., John Webster (Ernest Benn, London, 1970), p.3.
24. Don, D, Moore, ed., Webster: The Critical Heritage (Kegan Paul, London, 1981), p.4.

this there is no production from his pen, unaided or in collaboration, on record. Webster's popularity and reputation rest on his two plays, The White Devil and The Duchess of Malfi. It is during the seventeenth century that Webster was so popular with his The White Devil that it was acted four times at four different places.[25]

During the eighteenth century Webster was ignored because "in an age whose art was characterised by a civilised restraint in the handling of emotion and a preoccupation with decorum-the subordination of every detail to the whole-in matters of style, a dramatist who favoured an apparently piecemeal method of writing and excelled in scenes of stark mental and physical anguish was not likely to please."[26] During the nineteenth century Webster's popularity finds way through Specimens of the English Dramatic Poets (1808) by Charles Lamb. Lamb calls the book "an apologia for Romantic poetry," and that explains his attitude towards Webster, too. The study of Webster and other Elizabethans was the study of the poets rather than of the playwrights. Webster himself was called a poet, rather than a playwright. Webster's plays drew critical attention from a number of other critics in the nineteenth century. Stendhal, using a passage of Cornelia's mourning for Marcello from The White Devil as an epigraph to chapter 3 of Armance (1827), shows his acquaintance with Webster. He further brings Webster on the surface in his "espagnolisme"

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25. Contemporaneous theatrical popularity of Webster's two tragedies has been discussed in detail by G.K. and S.K. Hunter in John Webster, pp.23-25.

26. R.V. Holdsworth, Webster: The White Devil and The Duchess of Malfi (Macmillan, London, 1975), p.14.

Also see Don D. Moore, Webster: The Critical Heritage, pp.6-10.

printed by an anonymous writer in the European Magazine (1820). Here a number of abstracts are taken from The White Devil for a brief commentary. Before it H.M. (John Wilson) in his "Analytical Essays on the Early English Dramatists" published in Blackwood's Magazine (1818), calls Webster as the master of scenes rather than of structure and fills its section V with, The White Devil. An extract from this demonstrates his approach to Webster:

> This play is so disjointed in its action the incidents are so capricious and so involved - and there is - throughout such a mixture of the horrible and the absurd - the comic and the tragic - the pathetic and the ludicrous - that we find it impossible within our narrow limits to give anything like a complete and consistent analysis of it.[27]

After a long period, on November 20, 1850, The Duchess of Malfi was acted at the Sadler's Wells Theatre. It was staged by Samuel Phelps, as a reconstructed piece for representation by R.H. Horne. Afterwards there begins a new taste in Webster criticism. Now the interest is created from the theatre, the response to the plays being in their context of the stage. We notice the reprinting of Webster's plays one after the other. Sir Walter Scott brought The Duchess of Malfi in 1810, in the Ancient British Drama; in 1815, in his Old English Plays Dilke reprinted Appius and Virginia. Then came the standard edition, The Works of John Webster by Dyce in 1830, which served the readers for alomst a century. After 1850 there were clearly two groups of Webster critics. The first group celebrated the 'poetic power of Webster's tragic vision', whilst the

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27. Quoted by R.V. Holdsworth in John Webster: The White Devil and The Duchess of Malfi, p.34.

other (the theatrical critics) concentrated on structure, absurd improbabilities and gross excesses in his plays. Throughout the nineteenth century and even in some part of the twentieth century, "poets and poetry-fanciers saw Webster as a great explorer of the human soul and the mystery of the world's inequity. Swinburne, Rupert Brooke, T.S. Eliot, Allen Tate all bear witness to the pressure of Webster's poetic imagination. Swinburne finds Webster closer to Shakespeare in his power of projecting personal attitudes, like 'height of heroic scorn', 'dignity of quiet cynicism', 'deep sincerity of cynic meditation and self-contemptuous mournfulness'."[28] On the other hand, the theatrical critics were always scornful of the faulty structure and the improbable scenes in his plays. In this sense William Archer was the notable enemy of John Webster. Archer granted the good plays only when they "Obeyed... rational canons of dramatic construction" and which had "believable characters acting in coherently motivated ways (reflecting the ways of real life) moving step by step towards rationally developed conclusion."[29] When Poel's production of The Duchess of Malfi was performed in November 1919, William Archer charged it, saying that "the privilege of listening to its occasional beauties of diction was felt to be dearly bought at the price of enduring three hours of coarse and sanguinary melo-drama."[30]

The other approach to Webster criticism in the nineteenth century centres on the moral aspects of his plays. In this direction

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28. G.K. and S.K. Hunter, "Introduction" to John Webster, pp.49-50.
29. Ibid.
30. The Nineteenth Century, Vol.87,no.515 (January, 1920),pp.126-32.

the first attack was made by the firm christian Charles Kingsley. In his article, "Plays and Puritans," he speaks against the Elizabethan dramatists(including Webster) for their "licentious drama," originally objected to by the Elizabethan puritans.[31] The later admiration for the plays of Webster, Tourneur, and Ford, expressed by the theatrical theorist, Antonin Artaud, may be cited to indicate the nourishment for Romantic agony that the Jacobeans continued to provide, well into the present century. The revival of interest in the early dramatists noticeable in the last quarter of the nineteenth century must be associated with the anti-Victorian or decadent strain in the literary life of the time.

During the early twentieth century, E.E. Stoll in his monograph John Webster: the Periods of his Work Determined by his Relations to the Drama of his Day (1905) marks Webster's absorption into the machinery of German/American thesis-scholarship. Nowadays interest in Webster seems to be sought only by those who have a duty to understand him. Stoll's main concern with Webster was to study the belonging of his tragedies to the generic categories. The development of the academic criticism during this period moves away from a 'passive reliance on the scientific handling of evidence as a road to objective truth'. T.S. Eliot, in Four Elizabethan Dramatists (1924) talks of the nineteenth century attitudes to the Elizabethans. Eliot

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31. See G.K. and S.K. Hunter, John Webster, pp. 61-64.

marks similarity between Swinburne and Archer, inspite of their apparent opposition:

> No two critics of Elizabethan drama could appear to be more opposed than these two; yet their assumptions are fundamentally the same, for the distinction between poetry and drama, which Mr. Archer makes explicit, is implicit in Swinburne; Swinburne as Well as Archer allows us to entertain the belief that the difference between modern drama and Elizabethan drama is represented by a gain of dramatic technique and the loss of poetry.[32]

Eliot's review of the 1919 edition of The Duchess of Malfi presents a pretty good example of his understanding of the failure of the Elizabethan plays on the modern stage "due to their inherent weakness than to the unfitness of modern actors to represent their virtues." He comes to establish a new definition of the poetic drama, which should be sustained on a pattern below the level of plot and character.

Webster has often been criticised for his sententiae, seeming to be more random, bearing no relation to the rest of the play. A number of modern critics have made their statements about this. Ian Jack (1949) looks at the 'extraneous background of moral doctrine' having no relation to the rest of the play: W.D. Boklund calls the world of The White Devil as totally immoral; Robert Ornstein in his The Moral Vision of Jacobean Tragedy (1960), having examined both the plays, says that the moral lessons of the plays are inadequate; Clifford Leech in John Webster (1951) takes the sententiae as not "separated from the action or used for purposes of relief: they come

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32. T.S. Eliot, ed., Selected Essays (Faber and Faber Ltd., London, 1932), p.110.

in death scenes in final utterances of major characters. The result is an effect of distancing when immediacy would be better."[33] Though on one side Eliot does not find Webster worthy to be mentioned in a full essay, on the other side, he praises him, saying: "Webster is a very great literary and dramatic genius directed towards chaos."[34] Cambridge critics of the thirties took this very line as the base for their departure. M.C. Bradbrook in her Themes and Conventions of Elizabethan Tragedy (1935) sees Webster "in only uncertain control of his material."[35] Ian Jack says "Webster was denied insight into any virtue other than stoical courage; he could have looked to the morality tradition for inspiration; but perversely he chose the 'philosophical poverty' of the revenge tradition."[36]

Later studies of Webster during the latter half of the twentieth century also concentrate on the same points. T.B. Tomlinson in Elizabethan and Jacobean Tragedy (1964), G.O. Mac Donald in the Rhetoric of Tragedy (1966) and D.L. Frost's The School of Shakespeare (1968) show that no new insight into Webster is possible. One other type of Webster criticism arises during this century, which comes through Shakespeare. Myth — Symbol — image criticism has been very successful with Shakespeare's plays, which later was applied to Webster's plays in the same vein. Wilson Knight's 'Spatial criticism' explained the meaning of Shakespeare's plays through symbolism.

It was U. Ellis-Fermor who first attempted with the spatial methods to explain Webster's imagery, but she was not fully successful.

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33. G.K. and S.K. Hunter, John Webster, p.103.
34. T.S. Eliot, ed., Selected Essays, p.117.
35. Themes and Conventions of Elizabethan Tragedy (Cambridge Univ.Press London, 1973), pp. 186-213.
36. "The Case of John Webster," Scrutiny, Vol.XVI (March,1949),pp.38-39.

In Webster the "emphasis is far more on circumscribed local and satiric effects, and attention is drawn away from the content of the image to the obliquity of its organization."[37] Though Moody E. Prior (1947) and C.W. Davies (1958-9) present different ways to analyse Webster's imagery, Hereward T. Price has analysed, on a full-scale, the function of imagery in Webster.[38] Through all these critics it seems obvious that "Webster's structures are too deliberate, too intellectual, too much a mosaic, made out of his own reading, to be properly suceptible of 'Spatial' analysis."[39] Further the common point of view of the most recent critics of Webster is that his plays cannot be analysed on a single model, since two kinds of motives are present there at the same time. Eliot has said "in his greatest tragedies Webster has a kind of pity for all his characters, an attitude to good and bad alike which helps to unify his pattern."[40] James Smith made the earliest plea regarding the double model presented at the same time.

Travis Bogard has shown that as master of counterpoint, Webster has presented the two models simultaneously perfectly. He says Webster is a great dramatist because "seeing the world with both pity and contempt he remained faithful to his vision by blending

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37. G.K. and S.K. Hunter, John Webster, p.107.
38. For detailed analysis see "The Function of Imagery in Webster," P.M.L.A., Pt.2. Vol.70 (1955), pp.717-739.
39. G.K. and S.K. Hunter, John Webster, p.107
40. Ibid., p.108.

two almost incompatible generes - tragedy and satire."[41] Hence the double action in Webster's plays is traced in terms of 'satiric counterpoint to the tragic action.' Bogard puts Webster on positive grounds comparing him with Shakespeare. "If Shakespeare's tragedy is a vortex —— centering the moral universe in the suffering soul of an individual, Webster's may be likened to a framed general action like a stage panorama which makes its most significant revelations through the presentation of men's relations to man."[42]

Even the cursory survey of Webster criticism given above indicates that there has been a complete absense of biographical criticism. This is, as we have mentioned earlier, because not much details are available about Webster's personal life. Any meaningful study of Webster's tragedies should first concentrate on Webster's response to the milieu, which he purports to present in his plays. The complaint of some critics that Webster lacks moral vision and presents a centreless world can also be explained only with reference to this sociological approach. The world presented by Webster can be understood properly only if we stop comparing him with Shakespeare and try to understand his ironic, satirical method which he borrowed primarily from Marlowe and Ben Jonson. The analysis of the two plays of Webster, which is the subject matter of the following two chapters, is aimed to demonstrate that most important critical strategy in evaluating Webster would be a firm grasp of the milieu and the dramatist's satirical attitude.

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41. The Tragic Satire of John Webster (Univ. of California Press, Berkeley, 1955), pp. 147-149.
42. See G.K. and S.K. Hunter, John Webster, p. 109.

CHAPTER II

THE WHITE DEVIL

The White Devil (1612) was Webster's first major attempt at writing a full-length play. The source of the play is the actual contemporary history of Italy. The murder of Vittoria Accoramboni in 1585 was a know historical fact to the literate Jacobean audience. Pioneering work has been done by G. Boklund, who has examined a large number of materials about events in Italy and England to demonstrate Webster's basic reliance upon the actual events and a clever deviation from historical facts which suited his artistic purpose. The actual history of the life of Vittoria Accoramboni, as authentically recorded, has been given by John Russell Brown.[1] Several versions of the source were available at the time the play was written. Webster used eclectically a number of sources including contemporary gossips and news-mongering. Boklund has confirmed that Webster has largely retained the outline of the story connected with Vittoria, although he did use certain events which are invented and do not seem to be based on the available historical accounts.

Besides the historical sources Webster has drawn on the Elizabethan and Jacobean drama for some of the details, like the satirical malcontents, ghosts, intrigues, etc. The relationship of the main characters in the play and their --"passion, murders of expediency, imprisonment, marriage, murders of revenge" were largely taken from the Fugger News-letter, and Florio's "A Letter."[2] But Webster has departed from the above sources in making Vittoria

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1. "Introduction" to The White Devil, ed., John Russell Brown (Methuen, London, 1960), pp. XXVI-XXVII.
2. Ibid., P.XXXIII.

directly responsible for the murder of her husband and Isabella, the wife of the Duke of Bracciano. Further he has elaborated Vittoria's brother's character and has assigned him the role of a satirical commentator intermittently in the story which does not find historically factual bearing.

The play is set in Italy. The major characters are the Duchess and Cardinals. The motives are passionate love, ambition, jealousy, and revenge. The action takes the form of Machiavellian intrigues, poisoning, stabbing, and court ceremonials. The traditions of using villains as major characters are not Italian but native. They are drawn from Shakespeare's models and Marston's and Middleton's explorations of evil in human nature. Webster has used a hot-house setting and presented the wild justice of revenge and a loud cry for justice. Besides the content and the sententious style, he adopted the contemporary fall of narrative drama. The conventions of the chronicle play - episodes of papal election, wedding festivities, use of lawyer, courtier, of physician, and presentation of a sequence of events rather than a single crisis - are used in The White Devil as well as The Duchess of Malfi. "Webster combined a chronicle play technique with interests and devices derived from mediaeval tragedy, and so presented the rise and fall of Fortune's wheel."[3]

Webster has enlarged Shakespeare's example by including in his plays domestic crisis while retaining the broad political and societal outline of a chronicle play. Besides the devices of Shakespeare, Marston, Middleton, and Chapman, Webster has used the

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3. "Introduction" in John Russell Brown's The White Devil, p.Xl.

sophisticated sensationalism of Beaumont and Fletcher's tragi-comedy. This sensationalism has been conveyed in the rapid change in the attitudes of some of the major characters, besides a series of deaths.

The title of the play gives a clue to the world of Webster's play. It hints at the characteristics of the people who inhabit this world. Hypocrisy and devilishness of the apparently honest and virtuous characters are the main fulcrum upon which the action revolves. Simulation, is the probable quality of almost all the characters. Even the character (Cornelia) who does not fall in with this parameter gets involved into this world of simulation, betrayal and murderous treachery. The play deals with sexual infidelity as the prime force of the action. Sexual infidelity and lustful indulgence are inextricably interwoven into the fabric of money as a means of preferment and status. The play deals with the story of Vittoria, wife of Camillo, who beguiles her husband to be able to offer her body to the Duke of Bracciano. Bracciano is married to Isabella, the sister of Francisco who is the Duke of Florence. Vittoria's brother Flamineo plays the pander in the lustful affair between Bracciano and Vittoria. Flaménio's brother Marcello and his mother Cornelia are relatively righteous. As the story of Bracciano's lustful involvement with Vittoria moves, it becomes a matter of knowledge of all those who are connected either with Vittoria or with Bracciano. The gamut which the course of Vittoria's lust and Bracciano's adulterous involvement brings traverse their fatal consequences, and draws in all the major participants in the action. During the entire action of the play the picture of the dramatic world

is one of chaos where all values of life are in a topsy-turvical state.

The themes, the mood, and the atmosphere of the play are all established as soon as the play opens. The action of the play has been put on a sure footing for movement in the very first word "banish'd." Lodovico has been banished for which he blames the current state of affairs in his country, the role of Fate, and the hypocritical behaviour of people in position.[4] Lest Lodovico's banishment should remain undeserved, his friends Antonelli and Gaspero remind him of the reckless life that he led and his profligate behaviour that he pursued in the past, which have brought his present condition of near destitution. All his selfish, flattering friends who attended his, "prodigal feasts,/ Wherein the phoenix scarce could scape your throats,/ Laugh at your misery...."[5] Desertion by selfish flattering followers, who had licked Lodovico's toes in the days of prosperity, is symptomatic of a general state of affairs in the society in which the characters of this play live. Lodovico is guilty of "certain murders here in Rome,/ Bloody and full of horror," but he has escaped punishment so far. Gaspero reminds him that, "the law doth sometimes mediate," to allow the sinner to self-punishment through penance. Lodovico's banishment, concludes Gaspero, should be taken by him as law's avoidance of extreme punishment and offer to him an opportunity to live in penance and, "in the example better these

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4. John Russell Brown, The White Devil (Methuen, London, 1967), pp.7-8 All subsequent textual quotations are from this edition of the play.

5. Ibid., p.9.

bad times." This gives Lodovico an opportunity to dilate upon the inequality of justice. This is because Bracciano who, "now lives in Rome,/ And by close pandarism seeks to prostitute/ The honour of Vittoria Corombona," has not been brought to the book of law for his adultery. Bracciano's punishing Lodovico with banishment is an example of a prostitute's preaching sexual virtue to another whore. Vittoria "might have got my (Lodovico's) pardon/For one kiss to the duke." Antonelli tries to console Lodovico with "painted comforts" in following the proverbial saying that, "affliction expresseth virtue." Lodovico threatens to, "make Italian cut-works in their (Bracciano's and Vittoria's) guts," if ever he returned. Lodovico's response to Antonelli's hope of getting his banishment repealed is less optimistic and more expressive of the characteristics of crooked people:

> Great men sell sheep, thus to be cut in pieces,
> When first they have shorn them bare and sold their fleeces.[6]

Thus the first scene, though short, makes the action of the play move with immediate vigour and acceleration. It draws the picture of a corrupt society and more corrupt administration where reward and punishment are not awarded for virtue and evil but because of expediency and the caprice of those in power and their power brokers.

"The close pandarism to prostitute the honour of Vittoria" mentioned in the opening scene is presented in figure in action in the following scene. The situation is the planned visit of Bracciano to Vittoria's bed chamber. Flamineo plays the main part in the situation. To clear the ground for Bracciano's adulterous journey to

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6. Ibid., p.11.

the bed of the lustful Vittoria, Flamineo convinces Bracciano that he is welcomed to Vittoria's bed chamber. Bracciano's doubts on account of Vittoria's "coyness" are immediately cleared by Flamineo's characterising this quality in woman as "but the superficies of lust." He argues that women "are politic," because "they know our desire is increas'd by the difficulty of enjoying; whereas satiety is a blunt, weary and drowsy passion."[7] He proves his point through a familiar and commonplace experience: "If the buttery-hatch at court stood continually open there would be nothing so passionate crowding, nor hot suit after the beverage."[8] In Flamineo's argument we find a mixture of the roles of a dramatic personae and a satiric commentator. The same pattern is observable in his description of Camillo, while discounting Bracciano's uncertainty over his success in winning Vittoria for a lustful cohabitation. The uncertainty stems from his apprehension of Camillo's jealousy which can be a possible hindrance in the way of the fulfilment of his lustful passion. Flamineo's argument in this matter paints Camillo as an impotent husband having oblique physique and empty mind, a virtual idiot. This strengthens his argument in favour of Bracciano's success in spite of Vittoria's possible diffidence. Through a variety of arguments Flamineo proves that his sister is keenly interested in Bracciano's "amorous" journey. Flamineo mixes his general remarks on lustful woman with his personal experience to lend authenticity to his argument. He appears as an experienced instructor to Bracciano in his adulterous venture.[9]

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7. Ibid., p.12.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid., pp.13-14.

Flamineo in the most qualitative manner gulls Camillo into keeping him away from Vittoria's bed chamber for the night. From Camillo's grumbling he has gathered that the former is suspicious of his wife's favourable response to Bracciano's amorous advances to her. He shuts Camillo locked in a room to avoid any chance of his intruding upon Bracciano's "amorous progress." Eventually the stage is cleared for the two "amorous actors." Vittoria's inclination towards Bracciano is strengthened by her brother's presenting to her a vision of future prosperity and eminence through money.

The feeling of uncertainty that we noticed in Bracciano's earlier response to Flamineo's encouragement continues even when he is in a compromising situation with Vittoria. Bracciano's eloquence seems to fail him and he can only make "vows" and supplicate to Vittoria not to forsake him. Ominously Webster brings in a Marlovian echo in Bracciano's first utterance on meeting Vittoria:

> I could wish time would stand still
> And never end this interview, this hour,
> But all delight doth itself soon'st devour.[10]

The above lines remind us of Dr. Faustus's ironically expressed "immortal joy" in his act of demoniality with Helen as well as his frantic supplication to arrest the course of nature to escape or even delay his damnation, which in reality is immortality with a bang. This situation of Bracciano-Vittoria encounter is fraught with ominous foreboding. The foreboding conveyed in figure in speech echoing Dr. Faustus is followed by figure in action in the

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10. Ibid., p.23.

unexpected appearance of Cornelia behind the scene of adultery.[11] There is a profound dramatic irony in the two adulterous lovers' references to "Withered blackthorn," "digging of a grave," "mildew on a flower," etc., during their "amorous encounter." The Consequence of this meeting is prophetically voiced through the imagery of violence and destruction contained in Cornelia' aside:

> My fears are fall'n upon me, O my heart!
> My son the pandar: now I find our house
> Sinking to ruin. Earthquakes leave behind,
> Where they have tyrannized, iron, or lead, or stone,
> But -- woe to ruin -- violent lust leaves none.[12]

Before the happy union between Bracciano and Vittoria fructifies into a bliss of physical satisfaction, Cornelia's appearance brings a violent shrieking which propels the movement of the action into a disasterous direction. But before this violent shaking is brought in Webster makes Vittoria narrate to Bracciano her recent dream which has multiple dramatic functions in the play. Vittoria's narration of the dream suggests that the potent hindrances in the way of her union with Bracciano are Camillo and Bracciano's wife, Isabella. The narration suggests that both need to be done in inorder to clear the path of her continuing adulterous cohabitation with him. Besides this the extended naration serves as a device of distancing. Before any violent or destructive event Webster uses this narrative device of distancing which makes the violent happening maximally

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11. Clifford Leech in his book on Webster has mentioned the device of figure in speech followed by figure in action as a recurrent pattern in Webster's two major tragedies.
12. The White Devil, p.24.

effective. Then the narration abounds in images of good and virtue (the Yew tree) in the midst of images of evil and destruction such as "pick-axe," "rusty spade," "shallow grave," etc.

In the midst of Bracciano's loud protestation of love and promise of protection, delight, and fruition, Cornelia, like a lightning in the otherwise quite atmosphere, shoots on the stage to pronounce her curse of doom on Bracciano and Vittoria: "woe to light hearts-they still forerun our fall." While Bracciano is caught in a tight corner and Vittoria is rendered tumbling for works in her defiance, Flamineo unsuccessfully tries to control his mother and takes her away from the scene which he had planned so meticulously. She reminds Bracciano of his duty as a Duke by setting examples of virtuous actions to be followed by others and not to act as a destructive "mildew" upon the happy life of the poor folk. She almost unnerves Bracciano by her information to him that his wife Isabella is in Rome that night.She uses images of violence, destruction, and betrayal which would be the logical consequence of the immoral affair between Vittoria and Bracciano. While Vittoria feels caught in the net of Cornelia's curses Bracciano resolves to send for Dr. Julio whose role at this stage is left enwrapped in suspense. But in the context of Vittoria's suggestion in her dream narration to get Isabella done in, the call for Dr. Julio seems ominous.

The First Act ends with an altercation between Flamineo and his mother which in fact is Flamineo's bold and candid exploration of his role as a pimp for which he blames both his economic condition and the prevalent corrupt customs and practices of the time. Cornelia's

protestation of morality, human dignity, and other social and ethical values are almost lost in the loud defense by Flamineo of his evil behaviour and action. Flamineo's eloquent defense which throws light on the world in which he live as well as on his own past, needs to be quoted in detail:

> Flamineo: Pray what means have you
> To keep me from the galleys, or the gallows ?
> My father prov'd himself a gentleman,
> Sold all's land, and like a fortunate fellow,
> Died ere the money was spent. You brought me up
> At Padua I confess, where I protest
> For want of means, -- the University judge me,--
> I have been fain to heel my tutor's stockings
> At least seven years: conspiring with a beard
> Make me a graduate,-then to this duke's service:
> I visited the court, whence I return'd,
> More courteous, more lecherous by far,
> But not a suit the richer,-and shall I,
> Having a path so open and so free
> To my preferment, still retain your milk
> In my pale forehead? no this face of mine
> I'll arm and fortify with lusty wine
> 'Gainst shame and blushing.[13]
>
> X X X X X X X X X X
>
> I would the common'st courtezan in Rome
> Had been my mother rather then thyself.
> Nature is very pitiful to whores
> To give them but few children, yet those children
> Plurality of fathers,-they are sure
> They shall not want Go, go,
> Complain unto my great lord Cardinal,
> Yet may be he will justify the act.[14]

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13. Ibid., pp.29-30.
14. Ibid., p.30.

Uneffected by his mother's moral preachings, Flamineo resolves to pursue his design of getting preferment through evil deeds. Here his unambiguous decision to follow his target through Machiavellian means strongly echoes the characters of Marlowe's young Mortimer in Edward II, and the Guise in Massacre at Paris. Flamineo's concluding speech in the first Act is a running commentary on his nature and psychic make up:

> Flamineo: The Duchess come to court, I like not that,-
> We are engag'd to mischief and must on:
> As rivers to find out the ocean
> Flow with crook bendings beneath forced banks,
> Or as we see, to aspire, some mountain's top,
> The way ascends not straight, but imitates
> The subtle foldings of a winter's snake,
> So who knows policy and her true aspect,
> Shall find her ways winding and indirect.[15]

By the end of Act I some of the structural, stylistic and thematic patterns of the play have already been established. The course of the action so far indicates that it will proceed in the direction of destruction. There are two potent dangers -one is the threat of Lodovico to avenge his banishment upon Bracciano and Vittoria; and the second is the arrival of Isabella in Rome, the place of Bracciano's lustful drama. Above all there are the ominous curses of Cornelia, which by virtue of their force and authenticity, threaten violent course of action. The second aspect of Webster's dramaturgy, i.e., his style and imagery establishes its uniqueness in this Act. Imagery has been exploited not only for elaboration and variety of narration but also as a device of character portrayal. Characters

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15. Ibid., p.30.

using the imagery give a glimpse of their own psyche as well as describe the characters for whom those images are used. Flamineo, for example, uses images of gaming, intrigue, deception, and betrayal. The images used by Vittoria are associated with lust, murder, and deception. Bracciano's images are largely connected, with amorous affairs which in the context of the play have lustful innuendos. Anecdotes and other types of extended narration have been used as a device of distancing. But their use sometimes halts the action, which brings in a structural flaw in the play. A picture of the dramatic world is firmly established as that of a society which values Machiavellianism and worship of Mammon. Familial values have disintegrated. Kinship, relational values have been thrown away in favour of money, prosperity and status. Courtly intrigues, hypocrisy, and betrayal seem to characterise life in the world of The White Devil. Three major characters have been presented so far. They are Bracciano, Vittoria, and Flamineo. Their antecedents do not have anything derogatory. But from the time they appear in the play their course of action depicts their character as registering a downward development.

In the following Act the pattern of intrigue, hypocrisy, and effort for mutual destruction have been further elaborated through the action and behaviour of different characters. As in the first Act we had only one virtuous character, i.e. Cornelia, in the second Act we have Isabella. Like Cornelia's Isabella's protestation of morality, loyalty and other human values is be-fogged by concealed devilishness of the other characters. Isabella's reported arrival in Rome gives a new turn to the action. Francisco, Isabella's brother,

takes up his sister's cause and seems to be all armed to confront Bracciano on account of his immoral relationship with Vittoria. Isabella entreats him mildly not to let his rough tongue set her and Bracciano "at louder variance." She is confident that her love for her husband will dissuade him from "infected straying."[16]

Before Isabella could try the charms of her love to reclaim Bracciano from Vittoria's entanglements, Monticelso, a cardinal, who is also Bracciano's kinsman, delivers a homily to Bracciano on a duke's duties and the effects of "insatiate bed." Monticelso's long rhetoric in a periphrastic style weighs rather heavily upon the smooth flow of the action. But its heavy weight of images drawn from drinking, adder's tail, and destructive fount are functional as they foretell the inevitable consequences which Bracciano eventually faces. The homily of Monticelso is followed by Francisco's more bitter and direct accusation of Bracciano. For some time the conversation between Bracciano, Francisco, and Monticelso seems to be studied and rather laboured. The deliberate extension of the hawking image by Francisco sounds somewhat undramatic. Bracciano-Francisco's alternation, accusation, and defiance reach the stage of threatening each other's destruction. But this ends in a seeming compromise and amity by the entrance of young Giovanni, the son of Bracciano from Isabella. The atmosphere which was filled with images of lust, poison, and destruction is temporarily cleared by Giovanni's child-like talkativeness and his burlusquing the leader of an imagined army. His sense of humour, and talk totally unconnected with the general

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16. Ibid., p.32.

drama of lust and intrigue seems to bring a transient truce in the animosity between Francisco and Bracciano. After the tension in the middle of the situation has relaxed, it is allowed to catch up again in the situation of Bracciano- Isabella meeting. Bracciano, an adulterer himself, has the effrontery to question his wife's motive to come to Rome: "what amorous whirlwind hurried you to Rome." Isabella's politeness, supplication, and protestation of love and loyalty can only be seen from Bracciano's cruel and trully bitter retort to Isabella's loyal love. Bracciano shouts in bitterness:

> accursed be the priest
> That sang the wedding mass, and even my issue.[17]

Without telling Isabella her fault Bracciano continues with his angry tirade and eventually pronounces his irreversible vow to remain separated from her in future. Isabella, like Desdemona, helplessly, without protest, accepts the doom pronounced on her by her husband. Not only this, soon after the meeting she tells her brother and Monticelso that Bracciano is not to blame. She takes the entire blame of her permanently breached relationship with her husband on herself. She informs her brother that she has taken a vow to remain permanently separated from her husband, which is as unrepealable as a decree by a law court. In the context of her earlier declaration to charm her husband back to herself with the magical effect of her love's "unicorn's horn" her present unequivocal rejection of her husband appears naturally baffling to Monticelso and her brother.

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17. Ibid., p.43.

But she tries successfully to lend conviction to her new stance by openly accusing Vittoria whom like a fury she threatens to destroy.[18] Bracciano's character appears almost despicable when he accepts Isabella's simulation as true. Isabella's resolve to travel from Rome to Padua immediately suits Bracciano's convenience.

After the exit of Isabella, Francisco and Monticelso plan a strategy to keep Camillo away from Rome so that Bracciano has unhindered sway of his lustful pursuit with Vittoria. The strategy of deception and treachery is at work in both the camps of Francisco-Monticelso, and Bracciano-Flamineo. Simultaneously with the play to keep Camillo away the strategy of getting Isabella done in is being hatched by Flamineo and Bracciano through Dr. Julio. As the Cardinal does not hesitate to use his office for deceitful activity, the doctor, too, seems to have specialised more in murder than curing diseases. Flamineo's introduction of the Doctor to Bracciano through piling up fantastic details of evil satirically sums up Dr. Julio's professional and personal characteristics:

> He will shoot pills into a man's guts, shall make them have more ventages than a cornet or a lamprey,-he will poison a kiss, and was once minded, for his master-piece, because Ireland breeds no poison, to have prepared a deadly vapour in a Spaniard's fart that should have poison'd all Dublin.[19]

The doctor is dispatched to Padua to enable him to make his murderous magic work on Isabella. Here at Rome Flamineo will make sure that Camillo is killed in a politic way which does not allow any room for

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18. Ibid., p.45.
19. Ibid., p.48.

suspicion of Bracciano's connivance.

Before the two murders have been planned in the above narration the device of distancing is used in Francisco's narration of the story about the proposed marriage of Phoebus, the God of light (i.e. The Sun). This extended narration diverts our attention from the immediate plans of murder. It also throws light on the pitiful condition of Camillo's cuckoldry. Besides this extended narration, the atmosphere of gloom is produced by the use of the image of murder, deception, and animality in sexual relationship. Images from Ovid's Metamorphoses ('abundance has made me destitude') and from Virgil's Aeneid ('it shall be treasured up in the depths of my mind'), in combination with Isabella's use of images of cassia, violet, and unicorn's horn, through contrast, only intensify the implication of the images of lust and destruction used throughout Act II. i.

What happens in the following scene is only a realization of the images contained in Francisco's:

> Like mistletoe on sere elms spent by weather,
> Let him cleave to her and both rot together.[20]

Up to the point of the murderous strategies finalised by the two camps the motives of the characters are clear. Bracciano's murderous intention is motivated by his lustful attraction to Vittoria. Flamineo's evil pursuance is amply accounted for in his defiant attitude to his mother at the last Act, whose moral preaching was calculated to dissuade him from the path of preferment which he has

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20. Ibid., p.54.

kept above any value in life. Francisco's plan in getting Camillo away is motivated by his intention to take a revenge upon Bracciano who has wronged her sister Isabella. But Monticelso's motive creates a confusion. He is Bracciano's kinsman whose honour he plans to destroy. Towards the end of the scene Webster suddenly assigns a motive to Monticelso's machinations, which is neither convincing nor dramatically appropriate. Monticelso as if to provide an afterthought of the dramatist, says:

> It may be objected I am dishonourable,
> To play thus with my kinsman, but I answer,
> For my revenge I'd stake a brother's life,
> That being wrong'd durst not avenge himself.[21]

Through a conjured dumb show the murders of Isabella and of Camillo are presented. Isabella dies of kissing her husband's picture which was poisoned by Dr. Julio. Camillo's neck is twisted by Flamineo when he is made to vault a horse, after his drinking bouts with Marcello and Flamineo. The two cunningly performed murders bring satisfaction to Bracciano, because now he feels that his path to lustful indulgence is without any hindrance. Before the dumbshow is conjured by a hired black magician, the structural pattern of the play was shaped and determined by the dramatic conventions of a history play. The movement of the story, the accompanying tone, attitude, and details of the action are in line with realistic convention. But in this largely realistic play the sudden induction of a different dramatic convention, i.e. a dumb show, does violence

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21. Ibid., pp.53-54.

to the structural integrity of the play. Certain critics have felt that Webster is guilty of creating confusion of dramatic conventions,[22] as he is guilty of creating confusion and uncertainty about the motives of some of his dramatic characters. The latter point may be taken up for final assessment only when we come to the end of the play. But the confusion of the dramatic convention can be taken up at this juncture for a brief comment. In bringing in jarring and apparently incompatible conventions-- of realistic drama and medieval tradition of abstractions -- Webster is not creating a new convention. This has been in practice in the Elizabethan and Jacobean plays. The problem is whether the dumb show is meant to strengthen the structure or detract from its integrity. The violence of the presentation of gruesome mutilation of human bodies was favoured by the ancient Greek and Roman practitioners. In spite of the Elizabethan audiences's love for the sight of blood and murder, such events have quite often been narrated. Visual narration of the dumb-show brings economy to the movement of the action "increases the tempo of /the performance by telescoping the plot."[23] It also considerably enhances the effect of horror which the events otherwise would have produced in the minds of the audience.

The next situation is the trial of Vittoria. The trial is arranged by Francisco in collusion with the Cardinal. Its purpose is to defame Bracciano publicly and thus separate him from Vittoria. "Lieger ambassadors" are invited to witness and lend validity to the trial. Flamineo, the instrument in the destruction of Camillo and Isabella, decides to put up a "feigned garb of mirth/to gull suspicion."

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22. See Deiter Mahl, Elizabethan Dumb-Show (Methuen, London, 1965), p.139.
23. Ibid., pp.141-142.

bitter"-- and on Vittoria's courage and frankness in her defence: "She hath a brave spirit." Webster's subtle irony that the alien corruption is very much home, too, must have gone on unheeded by the rif- raff portion of the audience, but must have made a great impact on the minds of the discreet ones.

The trial begins by the lawyer, acting as a prosecutor. The lawyer starts his indictment of Vittoria in Latin. Vittoria boldly protests against the lawyer's use of the "learn'd tongue":

> I will not have my accusation clouded
> In a strange tongue: all this assembly
> Shall hear what you can charge me with.[25]

The lawyer's "undigestable words" which are "Welsh to Latin" produce a comical effect in the whole drama of the trial. The unfamiliar polysyllabic words, unconnected with Vittoria's crimes, used to impress upon the juries point to the hollowness of the judicial administration as well as to the morality of the most immoral agents of social administration. The lawyer's incompetence is seen through even by Francisco who asks him to "put up your papers in your fustian bag, and cry mercy." Having dismissed the initial humorous situation of "learn'd verbosity," Monticelso takes over as a prosecutor and proceeds with the case.

Monticelso's accusation of Vittoria explicitly shows his prejudice. For want of any clearly establishable crime against Vittoria because of non-existent evidence, Monticelso's charges betray his own rotten character. He blames Vittoria for being a

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25. Ibid., p.66.

whore and for being unmournful on her husband's death. She is charged with tempting Bracciano to herself. The insinuation that she might have had a hand in the plot to get her husband killed is soon dropped because it appears difficult to substantiate it. Vittoria meets the demands of the occasion with superb mental resourcefulness, argumentative skill and undauntable courage. Vittoria humbly and with perfect balance of mind answers all the accusations labelled by Monticelso, and justly earns the encomium by the English ambassador: "She hath a brave spirit." Her defence with a superior skill and greater verbal command throws Monticelso's rhetoric into a mock-heroic eclipse. She prefaces her defence with a fighter-like spirit and a challenger-like boldness:

> For know that all your strict-combined heads,
> Which strike against this mine of diamonds,
> Shall prove but glassen hammers, they shall break,--
> These are but feigned shadows of my evils.
> Terrify babes, my lord, with painted devils,
> I am past such needless palsy,-...[26]

As her spirit and boldness outshine the malice of Monticelso so does her rhetoric surpass the abusive expression of her accuser. This is evident throughout the scene. Having failed to make out a convincing case against Vittoria, Monticelso fixes upon one instance to prove Vittoria's guilt of 'incontinence:

> Monticelso: Pray you mistress satisfy me one question:
> Who lodg'd beneath your roof that fatal night
> Your husband brake his neck?[27]

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26. Ibid., pp. 72-73.

27. Ibid., p. 73.

Fearing Vittoria's inability to defend herself against this factual occurance, Bracciano intervenes. Though Bracciano's explanation of the situation as contrasted with Vittoria's hitherto powerful defence of herself, does not add much to her advantage, yet it exposes the Cardinal's corruption in lending money to a near relative (Camillo, his nephew)on interest. This exposes Monticelso's Jewish mentality which runs counter to his position as a christian priest. Vittoria, however, by herself, is competent to act as her own solicitor. She says: "Grant I was tempted/ Temptation to lust proves not the act." Unlike Monticelso's similies and analogies Vittoria's powerfully effective metaphors render her accuser non-plussed:

> Vittoria: Condemn you me for that the duke did love me?
> So may you blame some fair and crystal river
> For that some melancholic distracted man
> Hath drown'd himself in't.[28] -- -- -- --
>
> Sum up my faults I pray, and you shall find
> That beauty and gay clothes, a merry heart,
> And a good stomach to a feast, are all,
> All the poor crimes that you can charge me with.[29]

The entire administration of the dispensation of justice has been brought in for ridicule. It is something like a thief trying to sit in judgement over another thief. Vittoria boldly challenges the Cardinal on the fundamental score of his own corruption:

> ... If you be my accuser
> Pray cease to be my judge, come from the bench,
> Give in your evidence 'gainst me, and let these--
> Be moderators....[30]

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28. Ibid., p. 76.
29. Ibid..
30. Ibid., p.77.

However, Vittoria's defence is left unresponded to or uncommented upon and she is declared by Monticelso as, "a most notorious strumpet." Her protestations, which are termed as 'prating' are choked by Monticelso's one-sided accusations. And finally she has been charged with incontinence and sentenced to be lodged in "a house of convertites," which are meant for "penitent whores." Even the announcement of this judgement does not unnerve Vittoria and she retorts "Do the noblemen in Rome/ Erect it for their wives, that I am sent / To lodge there?" The unfairness of the trial, where the voice of defence is maliciously choked, draws Vittoria's verdict on the corrupt court of trial:

> A rape, a rape ... yes you have ravish'd justice,
> Forc'd her to do your pleasure.[31]

Monticelso declares Vittoria's reaction as a symptom of madness and ironically equates her with "Fury." The palpable misadministration of justice of Monticelso and Vittoria's gradual alienation draw our sympathy for her against our earlier reaction against her as a woman who is both a whore and a murderess. Vittoria's acceptance of the doom announced on her raises her stature even though she is a "White Devil." Her fine words, before she leaves the trial chamber, deliberately made by Webster to appear like the tragic acceptance of a protagonist in a heroic tragedy:

> I will not weep,
> No I do scorn to call up one poor tear
> To fawn on your injustice,--bear me hence,
> Unto this house of - What's your mitigating title?[32]

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31. Ibid., p.80.
32. Ibid.

It shall not be a house of convertites-
My mind shall make it honester to me
Than the Pope's palace, and more peaceable
Than thy soul, though thou art a Cardinal,-
Know this, and let it somewhat raise your spite,
Through darkness diamonds spread their richest light.[33]

Vittoria's equation by Monticelso with fury forebodes more destruc - tion in the future. This combined with Bracciano's threat to the Cardinal in the middle of the scene, points to the violent nature which the plot of the play is going to unfold.[34]

The charge of murder of Isabella was not made against her because the information had not arrived until then. Bracciano knowing Francisco's destructive hostility to Vittoria, pretends to be friendly with him before the news of Isabella's death is conveyed to her brother by his nephew Giovanni, and Count Lodovico. Francisco naturally is puzzled by Bracciano's sudden softening and offer of friendship. Flamineo, who was acquitted by Monticelso in the trial scene, now decides to appear as a politic madman "to escape suspicion" on account of his complicity in the murder of Isabella. The scene registers a sort of trailing off in respect of the violent rhythm with which it has begun. This is done through Francisco's expre- ssion of sincere sorrow at his beloved sister's death and at Giovanni's innocent querries about the state in which the dead are after their bodies are consigned to the grave. But Webster would not leave his satiric sting even in this situation of relative placidity. His comment on Isabella's death is deliberately made

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33. Ibid., p. 81.
34. Ibid., III,ii, ll. 165-179.

to echo Vittoria's reaction to her husband's death in the early part of the scene to underscore the hollowness of Monticelso's charity and morality:

> Monticelso: Blessed lady; thou art now above thy woes,— will't please your lordships to withdraw a little?[35] -- -- -- --
>
> Vittoria: O he's a happy husband
> Now he owes nature nothing.[36]

Act III, Sc. ii which is acclaimed as Webster's great achievement as a craftsman, underscores the vision of a benighted world, where even the 'White Devil' like, Vittoria shines like a diamond. The scene leads on to further exploration of evil in regard to Flamineo who has been declared by justice as innocent. It also has to work out Vittoria's "Fury" and Francisco's threats as well as Francisco's moves after he has been told of his sister's death. Combined with these is Lodovico's possible revenge upon his erstwhile, flaine's murderers. Lodovico now, being pardoned his banishment, is in a more effective situation to contribute to the movement of the plot through Acts four and five.

Flamineo's feigned madness and pretended melancholy in the next scene leads Lodovico to ponder on the former's innocence confirmed by the court in the earlier scene. Flamineo knows that Lodovico now is a potent instrument to sabotage his evil machinations. In his pretended melancholy Webster finds an occasion to add to the

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35. Ibid., p. 82.

36. Ibid., p.71.

picture of corruption and evil in the dramatic world of the play. The following abstracts from Flamineo's utterances are relevant to support this point:

> In this a politician imitates the devil, as the devil, imitates a canon. Wheresoever he comes to do mischief he comes with his back side towards you.[37] -- -- -- --
>
> O gold, what a god art thou!
> and O man, what a devil art thou to be tempted by that cursed mineral! You diversivolent lawyer; mark him, knaves turn informers as maggots turn to flies,-you may catch gudgeons with either. A cardinal;- I would he would hear me,- there's nothing so holy but money will corrupt and putrify it, like victual under the line.
>
> ... here they sell justice with those weights they press men to death with. O horrible salary![38] -- -- -- --
>
> Religion; O how it
> is commeddled with policy. The first bloodshed in the world happened about religion. Would I were a Jew.[39] -- -- -- --
>
> For if there were Jews enough, so many
> chirstians would not turn usurers; if priests enough, one should not have six benefices; and if gentlemen enough, so many early mushrooms, whose best growth sprang from a dunghill, should not aspire to gentility.[40]

Act IV opens with Francisco's apparent reconciliation with the fate meted out to his sister. Monticelso instigates him to avenge Isabella's murder which Francisco rejects in cunningly enwrapped concern for people when two dukedoms are at war.[41]

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37. Ibid., p. 84.
38. Ibid., p. 85.
39. Ibid., p. 86.
40. Ibid.
41. Ibid., pp. 92-93.

Monticelso then suggests that "undermining more prevails/ Than doth the canon." For this Monticelso makes him available his,"black book," which contains the list of criminals of all times. Francisco would make use of the services of these notorious devils to undermine Bracciano. Francisco knows Monticelso's devilish nature and hides his own evil intentions from his knowledge.[42] The Francisco-Monticelso consultation about the revenge of Isabella's murder upon Bracciano clearly demonstrates that even these two pillars of civil and religious administration are as white devils as Vittoria, the whore, appeared heroic and dauntless in the preceding Act. Francisco's compliment to Monticelso's maintaining 'black book' for devilish purposes is as satirical as it is subtly sarcastic:

> I do assure your lordship,
> You are a worthy member of the state,
> And have done infinite good in your discovery
> Of these offenders.[43]

Francisco's strategy to lay a trap for Bracciano is ingenious. He proposes to have "some idle mirth in his tragedy" by pretending to being in love with Vittoria, which will naturally estrange Bracciano's relationship with her and will be a cruel and, painful rebuff to Bracciano's infidelity to his wife. In his plot to 'undermine' Bracciano, Francisco proposes totake the assistance of Lodovico whom the former has granted pardon and who himself, as we saw earlier, has pledged to avenge Isabella's murder. Francisco knows the abysmal corruption in which the society of the play has

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42. Ibid., p. 94.
43. Ibid., p. 96.

plunged. Hence he would use not power but money to achieve his goal. "Tis gold must such an instrument procure / With empty fist no man doth falcons lure."[44]

With Francisco's determination to avenge his sister's murder and Lodovico's assistance in this to destroy the murderer of his youthful love, the plot is prepared to catch Bracciano in a trap where he may lose both his name and life. In the next situation (in the house of convertites) Flamineo overhears a deliberately arranged message from the Duke of Florence (Francisco) about his amorous proposal to Vittoria. Bracciano happens to arrive there to read Florence's love letter addressed to Vittoria, which is full of amorous promises and promises of high preferment. This sends the unthinking Bracciano into a wild fury because he suspects that Vittoria had perhaps responded to such overtures from other corners. He charges Vittoria in more abhominable words than her prosecutor had done in the famous trial scene briefly discussed earlier. Vittoria's plea of innocence in this regared only adds fuel to the fire. Flamineo's intervention to save the situation, lest his own prospects of preferment should be jeopardized, is met with severe reprimands, abuses and accusations from both sides-- Bracciano and Vittoria. He tries to bring a chastening effect upon Bracciano through his reminder to him of being the worst devil, and upon Vittoria by gradually working upon her mind the thought that Bracciano's lust for her has not abated and that her dream of preferment should not be given up. In their altercation once again Vittoria's protestations have an

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44. Ibid., p. 99.

apparent profundity and sincerity contrasted with her logical arguments about her yielding to Bracciano's lustful temptation. Bracciano's charge of changeability in her emotions sounds naive, and puts him on the defensive.[45]

The high drama of amorous quarrel is brought to a smooth dilemma through Flamineo's clever manipulation of double dealing with both his own sister and his lord, Bracciano. He makes Bracciano to yield:

> Once to be jealous of thee is t' express
> That I will love thee everlastingly,
> And never more be jealous.[46]

Vittoria's acceptance of Bracciano's request for pardon cleverly reminds the latter of his promise for preferment and confirms Vittoria's image of a true whore:

> Your dog or hawk should be rewarded better
> Than I have been. I'll speak not one word more.[47]

Flamineo, too, is quick to remind Bracciano of the reward which is due to him for what he has done for him. Vittoria's and Flamineo's reminders to Bracciano are well-timed and cunningly delivered. Bracciano has no option but to accept the reminders of both Flamineo and Vittoria.

Bracciano now wants to undermine the Duke of Florence by arranging Vittoria's escape from the house of convertites. Flamineo suggests that consequent upon the death of Pope the town is in a

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45. Ibid., pp. 104-107.
46. Ibid., p. 107.
47. Ibid., p. 110.

state of turmoil and confusion. This background could be properly used to facilitate Vittoria's escape from the prison in disguise. While Bracciano proposes to, "instantly steal forth the Prince Giovonni, and make for Padua," Flamineo is advised to follow him with his sister, old mother and "young Marcello that attends on Florence, if he can work upto it." Bracciano promises advancement to all the members of Flamineo's family and Duchess's title to Vittoria. Before the scene ends, Flamineo narrates an anecdote of the crocodile and the wren, the barber surgean to the crocodile. The ingratitude of the corcodile and the failure of its plan to destroy its pain-relieving surgean are intended as a reminder to Bracciano at his possible non-fulfilment of his promise of reward as well as a potent threat that his plan to destroy his serving agents would fail. The anecdotal narrative, unlike many of such occurrances in Webster's plays, is dramatically functional here. While it eases the tension built up by the quarrelling participants in the lustful drama it hints at a possible complication in case of Bracciano's backing out of his promises.

The situation in regard to authority changes in the ensuing situation. Monticelso has been elected Pope, and hence now speaks with a changed tone. Francisco is happy that his plot to poison the fame of Bracciano has succeeded, as it is reported that Vittoria had fled the city of Rome with Duke Bracciano. Monticelso now invested with new authority does not have to hold a trial as he did earlier in Act III. Sc.ii. He announces the excommunication of Vittoria and Bracciano and the confiscation of all that are theirs in Rome. As Francisco did not trust Monticelso in the preceding scene, the later

is also distrustful of the former's intention in granting pardon to Lodovico. He interrogates Lodovico on this ground to have some intelligence about what is going on in Francisco's mind. But Lodovico cunningly evades the divulging of the secret plot prepared by him and Francisco to undo both Vittoria and Bracciano. Like chess-players Francisco and Monticelso, though apparently mutually trustful and friendly, try to outwit each other in their monouvres. Francisco does not tell the whole truth of the plot to even Lodovico because he is not convinced by Lodovico's blind support to him, even though he has pardoned him. Lodovico wavers a bit at the admonition of Monticelso with a possible excommunication if he ever ventured to indulge in killing again. To guile Lodovico he arranges to send reward to him to convince him that monticelso's outward disapproval of his participation in the planned destruction is only a mean to test his determination. The reward money therefore should be taken by Lodovico as Monticelso's green signal to him to go ahead on his projected path of destruction. This serves a twofold purpose: one, Lodovico will unhesitatingly assist Francisco, and secondly, the image of Monticelso will be tainted in Lodovico's eyes. Lodovico says:

> He rail'd upon me;
> And yet these crowns were told out and laid ready,
> Before he knew my voyage. O the art,
> The modest form of the greatness.[48]

The final Act opens with Francisco, happy with Bracciano's union with Vittoria in Padua: "This marriage/confirms me happy."

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48. Ibid., p.122.

In his characteristic manner Webster brings a juxtaposition of figure in speech and figure in action. Flamineo's complacent expression of happiness is followed by "saw you not yet the Moor that 's come to court?" The Moor is no other person than Francisco disguised as a professional soldier who has come to offer his services on hire to Bracciano in the event of a rumoured friction between him and the Duke of Florence. Even the cunning Flamineo is deceived and he believes that the "brave Mulinassar" (Francisco) is a fighter par excellence, and an upright gentleman. Foolish Zanche, the black waiting woman on Vittoria takes Mulinassar as one of her clam and readily "falls in love with him." The disguised Francisco is welcomed by Bracciano into his Palace as the Trojan's did the Grecian horse. As a part of festivity to mark Bracciano's marriage with Vittoria Mulinassar is invited to witness "a fight at barriers." Before the horse-riding sport begins, Flamineo and Marcello appear on the scene altercating about the former's amorous affairs with Zanche. In fact Flamineo's love for Zanche has been for a politic reason and not the outcome of any sincere intention, lustful or matrimonial. He frankly confesses:

> Thou art my sworn brother, I'll tell thee-- I do love that Moor, that witch, very constrainedly: she knows some of my villany, I do love her, just as a man holds a wolf by the ears. But for fear of turning upon me, and pulling out my throat, I would let her go to the devil.[49]

Marcello is not convinced of Flamineo's explanation, and the two brothers prepare themselves to fight. The object of brotherly quarrel

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49. Ibid., p.132.

ironically shifts Zanche's attention now to Mulinassar, whom she promises to disclose a secret intelligence to win his favour. Cornelia, worried at the rumour that her two sons are going to fight, hurriedly arrives on the scene. She knows that Flamineo is of the devil's party and Marcello is virtuous. Marcello's recalling his mother's narration of how as a baby Francisco "took the crucifix between his hands, And broke a limb off," only intensifies the horror which overtakes the situation instantly. As Cornelia tries to repair the two brothers' differences, "Flamineo runs Marcello through." Marcello's dying words envision some vague superior power, like Ate in Greek tragedies, which pronounces curse on a whole family. But this realization is deliberately overshadowed by Marcello's perception of a sublunary reality which sounds like a commonplace proverb:

> There are some sins which heaven doth duly punish
> In a whole family. This it is to rise
> By all dishonest means. Let all men know
> That tree shall long time keep a steady foot
> Whose branches spread no wider than the root.[50]

Bracciano has not forgotten how he was reproached and even threatened by Flamineo in the situation in the house of convertites, where he had a bitter quarrel with Vittoria after intercepting Francisco's love letter to her. Flamineo has murdered his brother in the dukedom of Bracciano, though Cornelia lies to the people that Marcello died accidently by his own sword, to save her other son. Bracciano announces his judgement on Flamineo who is now firmly

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50. Ibid., p.138.

caught in his trap:

> Only a lease of your life. And that shall last
> But for one day. Thou shal't be forc'd each evening
> To renew it, or be hang'd.[51]

"The fight at barriers" begins and Bracciano's helmet is secretly poisoned by Lodovico, as part of the plot prepared by Francisco. Physicians's assistance is of no avail as the "infection/ Flies to the brain and heart." Bracciano knows that his end is near but is not prepared to accept the reality of the final act:

> O thou strong heart!
> There's such a covenant 'tween the world and it,
> They're loth to break.[52]

Bracciano does realize the futility of his worldly authority in the case of the 'fell sargent':

> I that have given life to offending slaves
> And wretched murderers, have I not power
> To lengthen mine own a twelve-month?[53]

He knows that "this unction is sent form the great Duke of Florence," but is too late to answer Francisco's clever move. Bracciano's vision at his death is one of confusion and remains rooted in low life of conspiracy, deception, and destruction. The images of 'rough-bearded comet,' 'the dull owl', 'the hoarse wolf' bear out this point. Unlike the Duchess, whose vision has already been analysed, Bracciano cowers at the approach of death and feels frightened by its inescapable clutches. The vision that he finally sees confirms his association

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51. Ibid., pp. 140-141.
52. Ibid., p. 142.
53. Ibid., p. 143.

with the life that he has been leading hitherto:

> See, see Flamineo that kill'd his brother
> Is dancing on the ropes there: and he carries
> A money-bag in each hand, to keep his foot even,
> For fear of breaking's neck. And there's a lawyer
> In a gown whipt with velvet, stares and gapes
> When the money will fall. How the rogue cuts capers![54]

> Her (Vittoria) hair is sprinkled with arras powder, that makes her look as if she had sinn'd in the pastry.[55]

The churchmen likewise are envisioned as "gray rats that have lost their tails" and "crawl up the pillow." When the poison seems somewhat weak to fully ensure Bracciano's death Lodocivo and Gasparo, who have appeared disguised as 'Capuchins', strangle him to death with a "true love-knot." Before Bracciano is strangled, Flamineo in his pretended melancholy acts as a satiric commentator:

> To see what soliteriness is about dying princes. As heretofore they have unpeopled towns; divorc'd friends, and made great houses unhospitable: so now, O justice! where are their flatterers now? Flatterers are but the shadows of princes bodies-the least thick cloud makes them invisible.[56]

Flamineo's commentary as well as his gradual drifting, away from his loyalty to Bracciano to his symptomatic confiding into Francisco (Disguised as Mulinassar) whose real identity is not known yet, only contribute to the morally, ethically, and socially anarchic world where he lives in. The horror of Bracciano's death has been intensified by Lodovico's and Gasparo's mocking at his fatal

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54. Ibid., p. 148.
55. Ibid., p. 149.
56. Ibid., p. 144.

discomfiture through their Latin words apparently used for the soothing of Bracciano's soul. While the murderers disguised as capuchins to console Bracciano's soul are a gross prostitution of religion, their Latin citations as a formal religious ceremonial before a dying man are an extreme example of the irretrievable bottom to which religion has been consigned by the completely disintegrated society that the play purports to present. Vittoria's exclamation at the death of Bracciano succintly sums up the true nature of the dramatic world of The White Devil: "O me, this place is hell."

After Bracciano's death there is a fresh regrouping of characters. Zanche and Flamineo abandon Vittoria's side and realign themselves with Francisco. In the newly placed position of precariousness after Bracciano's death, Flamineo tries to reassure Vittoria by discounting her honesty in mourning the death of her husband (Bracciano). In doing so he elaborates upon the fickleness and changeability of women's emotions and loyalty in general. Flamineo's recounting of women's faults is an example of Webster's mixing up of the roles of characters in action and satiric commentators. Besides satiric function, Flamineo's long explication of women's innate rottenness serves as a distancing device before the next catastrophe is presented. The distancing is also achieved by Zanche's lascivious flirting with Francisco which is full of images of sexual innuendos. Now to please Francisco, Zanche reveals him the secret of the manner and agents of Isabella's and Camillo's deaths. At Zanche's disclosure Lodovico explains, "the bed of snakes is broke" and Francisco is

surprised:

> O strange discovery! why till now we knew not
> The circumstance of either of their deaths.[57]

Before Act IV. Sc.iii ends, Zanche suggests to rob Vittoria of her valuables and jewellery which was given in abundance to her by Bracciano.

A note of explanation is needed for Lodovico's and Francisco's ignorance of the true manner and agents of Isabella's and Camillo's murders. It is true that Lodovico was in love with Isabella and he will naturally take revenge upon her murderers. But the single-mindedness with which he fixes his target upon Bracciano and the cruelty that he showed to him while he was dying, need adequate and expilicitly worked out motive in order to make his action dramatically integrated and convincing. The same thing applies to Francisco. The only motive he can claim for his fatal manipulation against Bracciano is that the latter had rejected his wife who was Francisco's sister. But the destruction of Bracciano instead of working out a rapport between his sister and her husband while Isabella was alive, and, later working for the weal of Bracciano's dukedom in the interest of his nephew, does not seem to be based on sound motivation. Monticelso's later discovery of the true nature of events cannot have retrospective bearing upon his motive in his disastrous planning of gruesome deeds. It is difficult therefore to defend Webster against his critics who have felt uneasy with the confusion of motives in his plays.

Flamineo's position has considerably weakened after Bracciano's death from whom he had expected reward for his promise. His assumed

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57. Ibid., p. 158.

melancholy is now well on spark. This is so because Giovanni instinctively hates him and has ordered ban on his entry into the presence chamber. Flamineo's hardship is juxtaposed by Cornelia's pathetic mourning of Marcello's death. It appears that Cornelia's dirge has imperceptively worked upon his conscience.[58] But this symptom of the pricking of the conscience is too weak and as we will see later insincere, to register any development in the character of Flamineo. He feels frightened at the appearance of the ghost of Bracciano and is shaken for a moment at the implication of the ghost's "throwing earth upon him and showing him the skull." Flamineo finally chokes the voice of his waking conscience with his resolve that all his misdeeds "shall with Vittoria's bounty turn to good, or I will drown this weapon in her blood."[59] Lodovico in the other camp of the destroyers tells Francisco that he alone would undertake to kill the rest of Bracciano's train-Flamineo, Vittoria, and Zanche.

In the final scene of the play Flamineo approaches Vittoria to claim the 'bounty'. In the manner of a melodramatic situation he tries to give an opportunity to Vittoria to part with the booty she has received as legacy from her deceased lover. Vittoria and Flamineo play the game of hide and seek for destroying each other until they are overtaken by Lodovico, who enters into Vittoria's chamber with the help of a false key. Vittoria-Flamineo plot to kill each other does not appear convincing or impressive. It does create

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58. Ibid., p. 166.

59. Ibid., p. 168.

a temporary theatrical experience but does not have much dramatic value. This is so because Flamineo's challenging Vittoria for ingratitude in the context of his extreme frustration and insecurity would have been dramatically more acceptable than indulging in cheap tricks of befooling her. In fact towards the climax of the tragic movement any situation, which does not form a part of the unity of action in the Aristotelian sense, detracts from the total dramatic effect, even though it may be theatrically interesting. The rising of the dead in this situation has been included by Webster, justifiably much to the annoyance of his critics.

In the middle of the Vittoria- Flamineo tragic horse play Lodovico, Gasparo, and party appear and kill all of them-- Vittoria, Flamineo, and Zanche. In the final situation of the action Flamineo fully realizes the role of Fate: "Fate's a spaniel, we cannot beat it from us." He accepts death as "a long silence," but his vision before death is not any higher truth. He says:

> Let all that belong to great men remember th' old wives' tradition, to be like the lions i'th' tower on Candlemas day, to mourn if the sun shine, for fear of the pitiful remainder of winter to come.[60]

He gives an impression of exhaustion at his devilish indulgence rather than of any philosophical resignation to death, but he does show courage when his murderers are to strike him with swords.

Vittoria's courage is made to shine more brightly. She tells her murderers in an imperious manner:

> You my death's-man;
> Methinks thou dost not look horrid enough,

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60. Ibid., p. 185.

Thou hast too good a face to be a hangman,--
If thou be, do thy office in right form;
Fall down upon thy knees and ask forgiveness.[61]

She, in fact, commands the drama of her death with a perfect balance of mind and in the manner of a Duchess:

Vittoria: You shall not kill her first. Behold my breast,--
I will be waited on in death; my servant
Shall never go before me.[62]

But Webster does not allow Vittoria to attain to any higher perception like the Duchess of Malfi. Her realization is that of her personal guilt, unmixed with any supernatural or divine complicity:

O my greatest sin lay in my blood.
Now my blood pays for't.

Contrasted with the Duchess's vision of the heavenly portals Vittoria's vision is one of confusion and lacks clarity:

My soul, like to a ship in a black storm,
Is driven I know not whither.

Similarly, unlike the Duchess's maid, Zanche, too, proves heroic. Interestingly enough all the agents of evil in this play die without any qualm of conscience or explicit rigrets. This confirms Webster's undiluted presentation of the existence and operation of evil in life. Finally Lodovico and party are overtaken by Giovanni and the ambassadors. Lodowico discloses to Giovanni that the murders of Vittoria, Falmineo, and Zanche were done on the authority of Francisco. Following the characteristic convention of Elizabethan tragedies, Webster ends the play with restoration of order and praise of justice. Giovanni, the

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61. Ibid., p. 181.
62. Ibid., p. 182.

symbol of the order declares:

> Away with them to prison, and to torture;
> All that have hands in this, shall taste our justice....[63]

In spite of this conventional effort by Webster, it cannot be said with certainty that the gloom created throughout the play has been completely replaced by light.[64] This is not to say that Webster allows the survival of any evil agents but the gloom has been so thick and prolonged that the effort to dissipate it with light in a brief span of a dozen small sentences does not fully succeed. This, however, is not an adverse commentary on Webster's dramaturgy but only a reiteration of the stance that Webster's exploration of evil is unsparing. Webster has been aware of this type of impression to be taken home by his audience and hence added in the form of a short epilogue that the play is "a true imitation of life, without striving to make nature a monster."

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63. Ibid., p. 186.

64. See Larry S. Champion, Tragic Patterns in Jacobean and Caroline Drama (Univ. of Tennessee, New York, 1977), p.

CHAPTER III

THE DUCHESS OF MALFI

The Duchess of Malfi is the most mature play of Webster. It has got repetative echoes from The White Devil, so far as the pattern of characters, dramatic devices of masque, and dumb-shows, use of images, and linguistic styles are concerned. This play, too, is full of sufferings, deaths and horrors and uses satirical commentators. But it marks an advance over its preceding companion in regard to Webster's greater interest in artistry and mellowness vision. This play, too, abounds in sensationalism, no doubt, but it remains within artistic control, and is not allowed to detract from the unity of effect of the whole play. In its ironic probing into the rottenness of the contemporary society it is more unsparing than the preceding play. But the satiric element is not allowed to be too pronounced to detract from the solid artistic merits of the play. For this purpose a greater variety of moods, situations, and motives have been used.

In the recent criticism of Webster a significant aspect which has drawn critical attention most, is an exploration into the possible sources of his plays. Boklund's The Duchess of Malfi: Sources, Themes, Characters (1962) is an addition to the already existing studies of this nature by Prof. Mario Praz.[1] Prof. Praz has tried to show Webster's indebtedness for his The Duchess of Malfi to Richie's English translation of "The Famous History of Herodotus (1584). Other sources are Bandello's novella and Lope de Vega's play, El Mayordomo de la Duquesa de Amalfi. But in absence of any definitive proof of Webster's knowledge of the Italian language, the

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1. Times Literary Suplement (18 June, 1954).

talk of these narrative sources seems to be rather far-fetched.[2] In fact, the solid source upon which Webster has drawn is the history of his contemporary England. Webster was an acute observer of life in the midst of which he himself had lived. His observation of the reality of this life must have found corroboration in story books dealing with courtly corruption in Italy which the Elizabethans relished to read and see presented on the stage. George Whetstone's Heptameron of Civil Discourses (1582), which contained the story of a Cardinal condemned as a tyrant for revenging the choice by his sister of a person of lower status as her husband, and discussion about social troubles preventing unequal marriages, must have been the direct source of Webster. But in fact The Duchess of Malfi contains a slice of English court life which was infested with intelligencers, hired assassins, and sexual trafficking for preferment during the reign of James I.

The Duchess of Malfi has the width and breadth of a history play with characteristics of domestic tragedy and tragical satire. As the title suggests the central figure in the play is the Duchess of Malfi. She is a widow and hence is forewarned by her two brothers- a Cardinal and Duke- against remarriage. She gets married secretely to a person much below her in status. This infuriates her brothers who plan elaborately to get her husband and childern destroyed. The Duchess's whole family is destroyed but the net of destruction laid for her does not spare all those who were used for her destruction,

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2. For other possible sources see F.M. Todd, "Webster and Cervantes" Modern Language Review, Vol. 51 (1956), pp.321-23.
Also see Kenneth Tucker, "Did John Webster know Shakespeare's King John," A.M.Q., V.1, 4 (Oct., 1988), pp. 125-129; and Robert F. Whitman, "Webster's The Duchess of Malfi," Notes and Querries, V.6 (1949), pp. 174-175.

including her two brothers.

The main story of the play as briefly narrated above gives an impression of a play built up in the manner of a composition based on cause and effect and through well defined motivations. But as we read the play closely this impression is not kept up because we find that there is vagueness of motives and sometimes even contradiction. It is for this reason that some critics have felt that the play has structural deficiencies. But as our analysis below will show these superficially observed weaknesses are a deliberate device for a deep and varied psychological exploration of the major characters of the play.

That the play is going to deal with a rotten, corrupt, and unhinged world is hinted at in the very beginning. The opening situation is a preparation for assembly in the chamber of the Duchess. The purpose and the items to be presented, and the participants in the situation are not introduced but are dramatized through a gradual unfolding development and conclusion of brief but significant situation. Before the participants in the situation arrive one after the other, Antonio, the steward of the Duchess's house-hold, who have just returned from France, is given an opportunity to describe the condition in France. His description of the condition in the French court is intended to offer a contrast to the conditions in Malfi which constitute the material for the action of the play:

> In seeking to reduce both state and people
> To a fix'd order, their judicious king
> Begins at home: quits first his royal palace
> Of flatt'ring sycophants, of dissolute

And infamous persons - which he sweetly terms
His Master's masterpiece, the work of heaven-
Consid'ring duly, that a prince's court
Is like a common fountain whence should flow
Pure silver drops in general: but if't chance
Some curs'd example poison't near the head,
Death, and diseases through the whole land spread.[3]

Having portrayed the French court in absentia, Antonio describes Bosola who is seen entering upon the stage at a distance:

Here comes Bosola,
The only court - gall: - yet I observe his railing
Is not for simple love of piety;
Indeed he rails at those things which he wants,
Would be as lecherous, covetous, or proud,
Bloody, or envious, as any man,
If he had means to be so....[4]

Antonio's role of a satiric commentator is temporarily interrupted by the acrimonious conversation between Bosola and the Cardinal who indulge in mutual accusation. The Cardinal is not interested in prolonging his conversation with Bosola because of his failure to reward him in the past for some misdeeds that he did at his behest. Bosola immediately changes role from that of a dramatic character to one of a satiric commentator: he anatomizes the characters of the Cardinal and Ferdinand in a language which is full of images of decay, exploitation, and destruction:

He, and his brother, are like plum-trees, that grow crooked over standing pools; they are rich, and o' erladen with fruit,

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3. John Russell Brown, The Duchess of Malfi (Methuen & Co. London, 1964), pp.8-9. All textual references are to this edition of the play.

4. Ibid., pp.9-10.

> but crows, pies, and caterpillars feed on them: could I be one of their flattering panders, I would hang on their ears like a horse-leech till I were full, and then drop off...[5]

There is an unnoticed change in Bosola's role again when he talks of the corrupt times where one has to follow crooked ways for survival and preferment.[6] His melancholy summarizing of the wretched conditions of evil-doers at other's instances in the society is both a satiric commentary which involves detachment as well as self-portrayal.

Before Ferdinand is taken up by Antonio for satiric commentary, he is presented chatting with his sycophants, which is in direct opposition with the image of a prince drawn by Antonio during his description of the French court. Antonio's introduction of Ferdinand is as follows:

> The duke there? a most perverse, and turbulent nature:
> What appears in him mirth, is merely outside;
> If he laugh heartily, it is to laugh
> All honesty out of fashion.[7]
>
> He speaks with others' tongues, and hears men's suits
> With others' ears; will seem to sleep o' th' bench
> Only to entrap offenders in their answers;
> Dooms men to death by information,
> Rewards by hearsay.[8]
>
> He ne'er pays debts, unless they be shrewd turns,
> And those he will confess that he doth owe.[9]

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5. Ibid., p. 11.
6. Irving Ribner in his Jacobean Tragedy: The Quest for Moral order (Methuen, London, 1962), p. 110, has summed up the various roles Bosola plays.
7. The Duchess of Malfi, p. 18.
8. Ibid., p.19.
9. Ibid.

Since the Cardinal's introductory portrayal has already been given by Bosola, Antonio only adds a few finishing touches:

> .... They that do flatter him most say oracles
> Hang at his lips: and verily I believe them;
> For the devil speaks in them.[10]

Antonio's detailed portrayal of the virtuous Duchess, culminating in "she stains the time past, lights the time to come," is a subtle combination of a commentator's observation as well as of an admirer's infatuation.

As it is characteristic with Webster, figure in speech is most effectively followed by figure in action. As soon as the last words about the Duchess are uttered, Cariola, the Duchess's maid, comes to command him to "attend my lady, in the gallery,/ Some half an hour hence." From now onwards we find that the part of satiric commentary being suspended the action moves in all earnestness. Ferdinand gets Bosola appointed as a "provisor" of the Duchess's stable. There is clearly the Cardinal's connivance obtaining the job for Bosola. Bosola is too clever and knows the brothers too well to be misled into believing in Ferdinand's present tenderness. He asks Ferdinand in response to his offering him gold:

> So:
> What follows? Never rain'd such show'rs as these
> Without thunderbolts in the tail of them;
> Whose throat must I cut?[11]

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10. Ibid., p. 19.

11. Ibid., p. 23.

Bosola is told by Ferdinand to closely observe the Duchess to

> ... note all the particulars of her 'haviour;
> What suitors do solicit her for marriage
> And whom she best affects: She's a young widow-
> I would not have her marry again.[12]

Ferdinand will not tell Bosola the reason for this. Ferdinand advises Bosola to "keep his old garb of melancholy" to enable him to work as a spy on the Duchess, unsuspected.

So far Ferdinand's plan of keeping his sister under surveillance is not made clear. However, when the Cardinal and Ferdinand encounter their sister there is a lot of fume and heat generated in their warning to the Duchess against her desire, if any, of re-marriage. Cardinal's strong warning is understandable because his argument is in conformity with the current social taboo about re-marriage.[13] His language, too, though threatening, is restrained. But Ferdinand's warning is unaccountably violent and full of sexual innuendos. The images used by Ferdinand are all connected with clandestine sexual act, tainting of blood and lustful indulgence. The climax of Ferdinand's warning is seen in his obscene expression to his sister in-"women like that part which, like the lamprey,/Hath ne'er a bone in't-"and his parting words are "Farewell, lusty widow." For lack of a clearly defined motivation, Ferdinand's hot words to his sister,

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12. Ibid., p.23.
13. For a detailed study of unequal marriages, Secret marriages, and second marriages in Webster's time see Clifford Leech, Webster: The Duchess of Malfi (Edward Arnold, London, 1966), pp.50-57.

all the time harping on sexual act, are rather baffling.[14]

In response to her brother's threats the Duchess takes a decision to get married immediately. There is a note of defiance in her decision:

> If all my royal kindred
> Lay in my way unto this marriage,
> I'd make them my low footsteps.....[15]

She has already sent for Antonio. As soon as he arrives, the Duchess, contrary to established conventions, proposes Antonio to be her husband. Cariola is placed behind the arras to act as a witness to the marriage to lend it legal validity. The whole situation is one of idyllic courtship in which the active part is played by the Duchess. Antonio is not surprised at this move of the Duchess. If he had a fore-knowledge of her intention the same has not been made clear in the text. Webster perhaps wants to show the Duchess's impulsive nature in this hasty proposal, solminization, and cosumation of marriage. The Duchess, as we have seen, has already been introduced in the image of virtue by Antonio and portrayed by Ferdinand as potentially sensual. In the idyllic love situation the two images of the Duchess are subtly fused. Antonio in the midst of the sensually evocative situation talks and behaves as unworthy of the greatness that has been thrust upon him. Antonio is vocal only when he acts as a commentator but in a situation requiring practical

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14. The confusion of motives has been worked out in detail by McD, Emslie in "Motives in Malfi," Essays in Criticism, Vol. 9, (1959), pp. 392-393.
15. The Duchess of Malfi, p.29.

reasons he fumbles, gets confused, and is quite often frightened. Antonio's apprehension at the consequence of this event (i.e. marriage) overcasts the lively mood of the situation. Ironically the Duchess's use of imagery pertains to death, e.g."Winding sheet" etc. The blending of the images of sexuality (blood, cold, stark-blind, circumference, Quietus est with kisses, stillness in motion of the spheres, loving palms) and those of fear, destruction and death, (purgatory, ambition, devil dancing in the circle of the ring, thrusting cold hands in the fire to warm them, false lights to rid bad wares of, Fortune) lends a complexity to the action of the play which is worked out in the subsequent Acts. As Antonio "leads his Fortune unto the marriage bed," Cariola offers her choric commentary which forebodes a destructive course that the action is going to take:

> Whether the spirit of greatness or of woman
> Reign most in her, I know not, but it shows
> A fearful madness; I owe her much of pity.[16]

Act II begins with Bosola busy spying on the Duchess. A few months have elapsed between the last Act and the beginning of the present Act: a midwife appears on the scene which indicates that the Duchess is perhaps pregnant. Before this impression is confirmed Bosola seiges an opportunity of acting as a bitter commentator on women who are interested in earning money through the selling of their flesh. The images used by Bosola for the old lady pertain to filth, low-life, insects, artificiality, prostitution, cozening, decay, and destruction.[17] This use of imagery, as it is the

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16. Ibid., p. 38.
17. Ibid., See Act II Sc, I, pp. 40-42.

characteristic pattern of Webster,[18] gives us a picture of both the user and the one about whom the images are used. Bosola's pretended melancholy gives him unrestrained freedom to talk about people and the society in their nakedness. In his melancholy contemplation before the appearance of the Duchess on the scene Bosola dilates upon the futility of honesty and straightforwardness in the corrupt society of Malfi.

When the Duchess appeares our earlier conjucture about her pregnancy is confirmed. Bosola gives apricocks to her which she eats voraciously. This further confirms that the Duchess is pregnant. The Duchess soon after eating the apricocks, brought by Bosola, falls into labour. The prospect of fatherhood to Antonio brings him only apprehension and confusion. " I am lost in amazement," he exclaims when the Duchess is in labour pain. It is his friend Delio who tries to help Antonio so that the Duchess's secret marriage and her going to deliver a baby are not known to anybody. The midwife is summoned in a hurry to attend on the Duchess. In the mean time, on the advice of Delio, Antonio has ordered all the household staff of the Duchess to remain in their rooms till the concocted theft story is concluded through a search of all the rooms. This was done to keep the people away from the place of the Duchess where she was going to deliver a baby. The situation which had seemed to have gone out of hands because of the sudden delivery by the Duchess is finally saved. The scene ends with Cariola's congratulating Antonio on his being blessed

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18. For a precise study of image pattern in this play see Hereward T. Price, "The Function of Imagery in Webster," P.M.L.A. Pt.2. Vol. 70, (1955), pp. 730-739.

with a son. Antonio heaves a sigh of relief, thinking that the future is now saved from a threatened danger. He goes out to "get a figure for his (baby's) nativity set." During his return journey he encounters Bosola unexpectedly. Bosola has been moving around in the dead solitariness of the night outside the Duchess's palace with a lantern in his hand to gather intelligence about the goings-on inside the palace. First, Antonio is frightened, thinking that the secret perhaps is partly guessed by Bosola. But soon he overcomes his nervousness by a pretended threat to Bosola with the authority of the Duchess. In the confusion that ensues because of this unexpected encounter and because of Antonio's nervousness at the superstitiously ominous import of the sudden bleeding of his nose, he drops the horoscope which is picked up by Bosola. From the partly investigated horoscope[19] Bosola knows that the baby mentioned in it is the one born to the Duchess. Now Bosola is convinced that "this precise fellow (Antonio) is the Duchess's bawd." Bosola gloats over his success and hopes for his advancement with "this parcel of intelligency." But he has still to continue working on the discovery of the father of the baby.

The next scene shifts to Rome, where as planned by Bosola in the last scene, Julia's husband, Castruchio has been sent to "deliver the parcel of intelligency to Ferdinand." Julia is already in Rome in pursuit of her lustful affair with the Cardinal. She had told her husband that she was going, "to visit an old anchorite/Here,

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19. Deeper dramatic implications of the horoscope have been discussed by John Stone Parr in his "The Horoscope in Webster's The Duchess of Malfi," P.M.L.A. Pt.I. Vol.60, (1945), pp. 760-761.

for devotion." For a brief moment the corrupt Cardinal tries to expose the lustful loyalty of Julia. The Cardinal's lustful involvement with Julia shows a cautious detachment and portends future destruction of her, conveyed through the image of "lightning moves slow." The Cardinal inadvertently gives a self-portrayal in the image of falconry used in his conversation with Julia:

> You may thank me, lady,
> I have taken you off your melancholy perch,
> Bore you upon my fist, and show'd you game,
> And let you fly at it....[20]

The strangely acrimonious encounter between the sometime lustful parteners is interrupted by the news of the arrival of Castruchio in Rome with a letter to Ferdinand which has, as we will see in the next scene, sent the Duke in terrible distraction. Delio, too, has arrived in Rome to smell if the secret of the marriage has to any extent been known to the Duchess's dangerous brothers. He knows Julia's relationship with the Cardinal and tries to exploit her lustful inclinations by offering her money. He does this with a hope that she, being "close to the Cardinal," may elicit some information from him. But Julia has just received a cruel jolt from the Cardinal. Naturally she does not oblize Delio. However, he comes to know that the letter sent from Malfi to Ferdinand which has "highly moved" him is ominous and perhaps contains the secret of his friend's marriage.

Ferdinand reads the letter from Bosola and feels that "this night he has digg'd up a mandrake," and has "grown mad with't." The sudden violent and almost distracted reaction of Ferdinand to the letter baffles the Cardinal in the beginning. Ferdinand explains the

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20. The Duchess of Malfi, p. 60.

cause of his anger as his sister has been "loose i' the hilts" and has "grown a notorious strumpet." He describes his sister's sexual appetite as insatiate and in his hallucination he sees the Duchess laughing as an "excellent hyena."[21] His hallucinatory imagination catches fire and is mixed with intense passion of frustration as it were at seeing his sister in the act of copulation: "Excellent hyena! talk to me somewhat, quickly, Or my imagination will carry me / To see her, in the shameful act of sin."[22]

This highly intense reaction to the Duchess's sexual act with "some strong thigh'd bargeman," leads to a sort of paralytic effect upon his mind, produced by passion. "Have not you my palsy," he replies to the Cardinal's surprised exclamation, "How idly shows this rage." The Cardinal's response to Ferdinand's distracted ranting about the various horrible ways he imagine to destroy the Duchess is ironically prophetic, "are you stark-mad." ActII ends with the presentation of a powerful situation where a human mind is thrown completely off the balance under the impact of a powerful passion, evil though this passion is.

There is a contrast between the studied discipline and reticence of the Cardinal and the distracted rhetoric of violence and destruction of Ferdinand. The sister's "unchastity" affects the two brothers entirely differently, though in the opening scene of the

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21. The nature and symbolic significance of Hyena in the context of Ferdinand's apparently irrational distraction has been discussed perceptively by Lots E. Bueler in his "Webster's Laughing Hyena," Philological Quarterly Vol. 59, (1980), pp. 107-110.

22. The Duchess of Malfi, p. 66.

play the impression was that they had a common argument-- the conventional taboo against widow's marriage-- for their opposition to their sister's marriage. But in the present situation Ferdinand's unbridled expression of violent passion is a pointer to his personal emotional involvement in his sister's affairs. The possibility of incestuous interest of Ferdinand in his sister, though unconscious, is strongly echoed in his images of sexual act indulged in by his sister, which is realized in powerfully visual terms.

The third Act begins in the nature of a lull before the storm. Delio and Antonio, in a mood of complacency, converse about the non-disclosure of the secret of the Duchess's marriage, even though considerable time has elapsed-- the Duchess now has two more children. Ferdinand has arrived in Malfi and we are apprehensive of the manner in which he is going to carry out his "rupturous" plan of destroying the Duchess. But his meeting with the Duchess is characterized by his unusual reticence and sympathy for his sister. This proposal of his sister's marriage with Malateste--the apparent aim of his journey to Malfi-- is in contradiction with his and his brother's stand on a widow's remarriage, so strongly debated and threateningly concluded in the opening situation of the play. Webster gives us a clue to a future destructive mischief in Ferdinand's proposal which he uses as a bait to fish-out the exact truth about the Duchess's sexual relationship with whosoever he might be. The lull is further prolonged when after the exit of Ferdinand a scene of distancing with tender courtship is brought in the following scene. It will be relevant to comment on the brief discussion between Bosola and Ferdinand in this scene about the efficacy of the movement of the planets and use of sorcery, and herbal medicines to force a woman's

amorous affection for a man. Though Ferdinand outwardly rejects such things as mere superstitions, it obliquely hints at the subconscious working of his mind which is incestually inclined. That the errand of Ferdinand is not simple and conciliatory, as he has led his sister to believe, is clear from his instructing Bosola to obtain a false key to the Duchess's bed-chamber.

The device of distancing mentioned above is used effectively in the amorous encounter in privacy between Antonio and the Duchess. Their conversation is full of tender, cosmic, and amorous images of spherical music and Venus with her two soft doves. The distancing becomes more effective by Antonio's narration of mythological anecdotes about coyness and cruelty in women (Daphne, Syrinx, Anaxarete which transformed them into unfruitful trees, whereas other fruitfull trees (olive, pomegranate, mulberry) had their ancestory in women responding favourably to the lovers.[23] Cariola calls Antonio's stories "a vain poetry," and herself in a light-hearted mood talks of the story of Paris and Helen, and Paris's embarrasment in "judging right three amorous goddesses in view, and they stark-naked." The conversation goes on with uninhibited expression of amorous and even sexual import till the Duchess feels, "when were we so marry?-my hair tangles." The "tangling of hair" or such light-hearted symptoms of sudden happiness are probably a fore-runner to calamities and destruction. Lest the situation intended for distancing should go out of proportion Webster makes Antonio and Cariola hide themselves behind the arras so that the Duchess is pleasantly ridiculed into thinking

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23. The Duchess of Malfi, pp. 75-76.

that she is talking to Antonio. In her long elaborate talk she mentions that she has a husband and three children and that she is hoping to get the eventual approval of her brothers. It is at this juncture that Ferdinand, with the help of the false-key provided by Bosola, enters the bed-chamber of the Duchess. The Duchess shows admirable balance of her nerves by not showing any discomfiture at the sudden, stealthily manipulated entry of her brother:

> 'Tis Welcome:
> For know, whether I am doom'd to live or die,
> I can do both like a prince.[24]

Ferdinand first hints to the Duchess to commit suicide -- "he gives her a poniard," but then he settles down to accusing her of lustful indulgence. Her protestations of chastity -- that she is married -- only burden Ferdinand's sub-conscious mind with his own frustration in his incestuous wilful thinking. He subconsciously identifies himself with her husband. He advises her to see to it that her husband's identity is never disclosed to him lest in his intolerance he should destroy him violently. In this situation Ferdinand's subdued anger, contrasted with his earlier violent rhetoric of destruction, appears somewhat enigmatic and calls for some explanation which the text does not yield directly. Let us recall Ferdinand's reference to his "palsy" during his distracted situation after he got the news of the birth of the Duchess's first son. There we mentioned that the 'palsy' was a psychological stage of paralysis under the strong pressure of passion of incest. In the present situation, too, paralysis continues. It is, however,

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24. Ibid., p.78.

too strong to find an expression in words. Besides, it is presented through the deteriorating mental balance of Ferdinand till the palsy worsens into lycanthropia. His warning to his sister not to disclose the identity of her husband is only the rejection by the sub-conscience of any person who could replace him as his sister's sexual pursure.

Antoino first thinks that the Duchess has been betrayed by Cariola in letting Ferdinand into her bed-chamber. Before he could further ponder over this, "more earthquakes" are foretold. The knocking at the door after Ferdinand has gone away gives a premonition of the defenseless predicament of the Duchess. She describes her condition like this: "I stand/As if a mine, beneath my feet, were ready/To be blown up."[25] The figure in speech (more earthquakes) is followed by figure in action in the appearance of Bosola who informs the Duchess that Ferdinand "is ta'en up in a whirlwind,/ Hath took horse, and's rid post to Rome," in the dead of night. As Ferdinand was riding away to Rome he gave his judgement of doom on the Duchess.

The Duchess tries to convince Bosola that her brother went away in anger because of Antonio's false dealing with the Duchess in accounts which has led to the forfeiture of Ferdinand's bonds with certain neo-politan Jew. Bosola is intelligent enough to guess that the story is a mere concoction. And he determines to get at the truth. The Duchess advises Antonio "to fly to Ancona" where she will send him her treasure for maintenance. For this the Duchess, to ensure public credibility, publicly charges Antonio with misappropriation

25. Ibid., p.82.

and orders his banishment. The cover of false charge against Antonio to facilitate his exit from Malfi is easily seen through by Bosola. He adopts different tactics now of eliciting confession of truth from the Duchess. He praises Antonio's nobility and uprightness which cannot be appreciated in a corrupt courtly environment and is unjustly punished. The Duchess is involuntarily drawn into the flattering praise of her husband by Bosola and exclaims, "O, you render me excellent music." She unthinkingly confesses to Bosola that Antonio is her husband. Bosola now directs his flattering words to the Duchess for her greatness and ability in chosing a man of low birth but high merits for her husband. Ironically she seeks the co-operation and assistance of Bosola in her affairs:

> As I taste comfort in this friendly speech,
> So would I find concealment.[26]

As the Duchess has been impulsive in chosing her husband, she has been so in "banishing" him and in confiding in Bosola. She tells her whole plan to Bosola and accepts his advice that she should follow Antonio on the pretext of piligrimage. The Duchess accepts Bosola as her confidant and guide: "Sir, your direction shall lead me by the hand."[27] Cariola's objection to using the cover of religion is dismissed by the Duchess as foolish superstition. The scene ends with Bosola gloating over his success in intelligence.

The Duchess unwittingly is drawn into the web of evil. It is to be noticed that here, even virtue for its survival has to depend on evil. The grasp of evil over the dramatic world is so pervasive that it is impossible to escape it. And once one is caught by its

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26. Ibid., p.89.
27. Ibid., p.90.

magnetic effect one has to act in a manner characteristic of evil. As soon as Bosola's deceptive flattery acts like sweet music on the ears of the Duchess she shows her immediate willingness to be guided by him. The first deed she does after coming in contact with evil (Bosola) is that she simulates -- she "jests with religion."

The next scene begins with a conversation among the minor characters about the military career of the Cardinal which apparently does not seem to fit in with the main story of the play. Its only relevance to the play can be to throw further light on the lack of religiosity in this pillar of religion, i.e., the Cardinal. The conversation veers in the direction of further satiric commentaries by the minor characters on the two brothers. The brothers are portrayed as vindictive, malicious destructive, and deceptive. Here a reference is made by Ferdinand to the son of his sister by her former husband which later on is completely forgotten by him. We will have occasion to comment on the significance of this reference later. With the investiture of the neo-military authority in him, the Cardinal declares that he will get Antonio banished by the Duke of Ancona. During the investiture ceremony, the banishment of Antonio, the Duchess, and their children have been presented in a dumb-show.

The dumb-show here, which was a contemporary dramatic convention, brings economy of action and a tightening of the plot sturcture of the play.[28] The Duchess's fate in the direction of destruction now moves with accelerated speed. Antonio realizes that "heaven hath a

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28. Ralph Berry, "Masques and Dumb Shows in Webster's Plays" in George Hibbard, ed., The Elizabethan Theatre, Vol. VII (Macmillan, London, 1981), pp. 131-133.

hand in 't." Inspite of this reference to heaven, fate, or necessity, the role of human agents in the destruction of the Duchess is too strong to be diluted.[29] At the Duchess's advice Antonio gets ready to go to Milan with his eldest son in search of security. The letter brought by Bosola in the midst of the sorrowful parting between Antonio and the Duchess only ironically comments on the futility of Antonio's running away for security in the face of grave danger to his life from Ferdinand. Ferdinand's suggestion in the letter that Antonio should meet him because he needs "his head in a business" is seen as a patent an invitation to destruction. The parting of Antonio from his wife is full of pathos bordering almost on sentimentality. In this parting the couple feel that they will never meet again and as we'll see this apprehension comes prophetically true. The Duchess having intutively perceived her destruction is already in a mood to welcome death. When Bosola with a mask appears again with the guard, the Duchess, who knows the courtly intrigues, and conspiracies only too well, concludes:

> When Fortune's wheel is overcharg'd with princes,
> The weight makes it move swift.[30]

She is not unnerved by the threatening gesture of the masked Bosola and the guard. Once she feels that "all my laurel is withered," at the exit of Antonio and their eldest son, she wishes her death to come immediately. But Bosola's errand is not to kill the Duchess this time but to tell her that her brother has made arrangement for her stay

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29. See M.C. Bradbrook, "Two Notes Upon Webster: Fate and Chance in The Duchess of Malfi," Modern Language Review, Vol. 42, (1947), pp. 281-291.

30. Ibid., p. 103.

in her own palace to guard her against columny of the tongue. The Duchess knows it well that it is a trap. But she is helpless and cannot escape it. The third Act ends at a note of ominous calm achieved through the Duchess's narration of the anecdote of the dog-fish and salmon, caught in the same trap.[31]

The Duchess's bold response to Bosola's efforts to bring her to grief -- "I am arm'd "gainst misery" -- is the main action of Act IV. Bosola describing the Duchess's dignified demeanour in the prison, elaborates upon her stoic endurance:

> She's sad, as one long us'd to 't; and she seems
> Rather to welcome the end of misery
> Then shun it:- a behaviour so noble
> As gives a majesty to adversity;
> You may discern the shape of loveliness
> More perfect in her tears, than in her smiles....[32]

Bosola's attitude to the Duchess is certainly sympathetic. But, caught as he is in the net of evil, he has to act villainously towards the Duchess. As commanded by his Lord, Ferdinand, he goes to inform the Duchess that Ferdinand would visit her in her chamber, and as he has "rashly made a solemn vow/ Never to see her more," no lights should be there in her chamber. Ferdinand goes to his sister on protext of "sealing his peace with her." As a token of reconciliation he "gives her a dead man's hand." When the lights are on she discovers that the wax hand was taken from the artificial figure of Antonio which was visible from behind the traverse. Bosola after the exit of Ferdinand explains to the Duchess that the meaning of the artificial figure of Antonio and their children mean that they are

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31. The Duchess of Malfi, pp. 105-106.
32. Ibid., p. 107.

already dead. This is done, to torture the Duchess's mind to the extent that she should go mad. The Duchess naturally feels that she is living in hell because in spite of her desire to die she is compelled to live:

> That's the greatest torture souls feel in hell--
> In hell: that they must live, and cannot die.[33]

Bosola has started feeling a reawakening of human sympathies in his soul. He tries to console the Duchess by advising her to draw solace from faith in God. The Duchess's projecting life in this world in terms of the image of a theatre movingly tells her pitiable helplessness as well as comments on human existence in the world in general:

> I account this world a tedious theatre,
> For I do play a part in 't 'gainst my will.[34]

Bosola is truly moved when he says, "come, be of comfort, I will save your life." He continues his argument with the Duchess by proving to her the inexorable course of life so that she may derive some philosophical solace to chasten her present condition of intolerable agony:

> Duchess I could curse the stars.
> Bosola O fearful!
> Duchess And those three smiling seasons of the year into a
> Russian winter, nay the world
> To its first chaos.
> Bosola Look you, the stars shine still....[35]

Bosola proves true to his newly awakened humanity and pleads with Ferdinand to "go no further in his cruelty," and allow the

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33. Ibid., p.111.
34. Ibid., p. 112.
35. Ibid., p.114.

Duchess time and opportunity for penitence. But Ferdinand is adamant and commands Bosola to further toture the Duchess by placing beside her residence howling madmen and by tracking Antonio down in Milan and doing him in. Bosola, in order to get the reward promised to him must Obey Ferdinand, at this stage, "much against his will." The Duchess retains, contrary to her brother's expectations, her balance of mind even though her tortures have reached their peak:

> I am not mad yet, to my cause of sorrow.
> Th' heaven o'er my head seems made of molten brass,
> The earth of flaming sulphur, yet I am not mad:
> I am acquainted with sad misery,
> As the tann'd galley-slave is with his oar;
> Necessity makes me suffer constantly,
> And custom makes it easy....[36]

The Duchess now does not blame human agents for her sufferings but some preordained superior force conveyed through expressions like, "necessity," "must," "Chain'd to endure"... etc. After the ineffective torturing by the madmen[37] Bosola appears again this time not in his true form as he did earlier nor with a mask as he did in the preceding situation but as a masked tomb maker. He tries to get the Duchess mentally prepared to meet her imminent violent death by talking to her about the transitoriness of this body, and the bondage of soul to the body in the midst of all the pomp and show and pride of manner. The Duchess retains her dignity and grandeur-- "I am Duchess of Malfi Still" — even in the face of her executioners.

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36. The Duchess of Malfi, pp. 117-118.
37. See S.Icheye Hayawaka, "A note on the Madmen's scene in Webster's The Duchess of Malfi," P.M.L.A., (1932), pp. 907-909.

Who would be afraid on 't?
Knowing to meet such excellent company
In th' other world.[38]

The Duchess's courage is comparable with that of Vittoria. But the difference between the two is that where as the Duchess dies with a full glimpse of heaven ready to receive her, Vittoria dies with a misty vision of her journey. The Duchess's long sufferings have not subdued her inner strength in any way. Rather it has brought in her a transcendental calm and humility:

... heaven- gates are not so highly arch'd
As princes' palaces, they that enter there
Must go upon their knees.- (kneels) come violent death,
Serve for mandragora to make me sleep![39]

The heroic grandeur of the Duchess's embracing death as a release from this world of evil is contrasted with Cariola's cowardly lying to escape death. Cariola's cowardice makes the Duchess's heroism shine more brilliantly.

When the Duchess, Cariola, and the Duchess's children are strangled, Bosola's pity flows more profusely. He shows the strangled children to Ferdinand and asks him, "Alas, how have these offended?" The consequence of Ferdinand's "offending" the innocents soon appears when he almost shrieks at the sight of the face of his murdered sister: "Cover her face: mine eyes dazzle: she died young." The innocence of the Duchess shoots intolerably intense light into the mind of Ferdinand, and, as we will see later, the intense shaft of the

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38. The Duchess of Malfi, p. 128.
39. Ibid., p. 129.

dazzled virtue eventually works madness into Ferdinand's mind. Ferdinand talks of the whole catastrophic events as a conflict between "innocence and my revenge." The revenge motif is presented by Ferdinand in the form of a rationalization of his behaviour towards his sister:

> For let me but examine well the cause:
> What was the meanness of her match to me?
> Only I must confess, I had a hope,
> Had she continu'd widow, to have gain'd
> An infinite mass of treasure by her death:
> And that was the main cause....[40]

But as we have pointed out earlier, Ferdinand mentioned once that the Duchess had a son by her former husband. How could he then expect an inheritance of the Duchess's property? This type of rationalization is merely a cover on his incestuous inclination to which reference has been made earlier. Bosola does not seem to be interested in Ferdiand's story of rationalization. He is interested in his reward due to his service. In the shock of the murder of his sister Ferdinand denies reward to Bosola and charges him with murder of the Duchess. Bosola's retort to Ferdinand's rhetoric of "ceremonial form of law" only throws additional light on the general corruption and rottenness in the society of Amalfi:

> Office of justice is perverted quite
> When one thief hangs another....[41]

Bosola receives a double set-back: he murders the Duchess with whom he had started sympathising, and he is denied reward which he tried to earn by indulging in evil "much against his will." This naturally

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40. Ibid., p. 132.
41. Ibid., p. 133.

introduces a fresh motive of revenge in the play. Bosola's revenge motive is clear-- he feels to have been betrayed by Ferdinand. But in the same breath in which Bosola explains his clear motive he talks of the pricking of his conscience as an alternative motive for revenge upon Ferdinand. There is some ambiguity from now until the end of the play about the motive of Bosola's revenge. We will comment on this aspect of the play at the appropriate occasion. The Act ends with Bosola's equivocal explanation of his determination to do something to bring him "peace of conscience" which is "worth my dejection." However, the balance of pricking of the conscince seems to weigh heavier than that of frustration at the denial of the expected reward. "A guilty conscience/ Is a black register, wherein is writ/ All our good deeds and bad," says Bosola and concludes that it is "a perspective that shows us hell." The vision of hell, which does not spare the virtuous, has been presented in the preceding Acts. That hell or evil embraces its own agents and lead them to destruction is presented in the final Act of the play.

Act V begins at a note of relative calm. Antonio, tired of a long strife for security, is now determined to meet the Cardinal and Ferdinand for reconcilement. His estate has already been wrongfully confiscated and given away to evil characters, like Julia, as reward for lust and adultery. Antonio is now interested in the fulfilment of his mission of obtaining forgiveness by the "Arragonian brethren" and not in the restoration of the estate he has lost. But soon he hears that one of the brothers, Ferdinand, has started suffering from a strange disease, known as lycanthropia, where he, when the fit overcomes him, imagines himself transformed into a wolf. "He steals forth to churchyards in the dead of night,/And digs dead bodies

up," and "howls fearfully." The doctor's citation of Ferdinand's description of himself becomes more significant when we retrospectively look at its incipient symptoms in his "stark madness" in the earlier situation when he showered words of abuse and violent threats of destruction on hearing the news of the birth of his sister's first son. We may recall also his being seiged of "palsy" in the same situation. The pressure of his intensely lustful incestuous inclination towards his sister has increasingly weighed upon his mind to the extent that he falls to "apoplexy." Besides this psychological parameter, in moral terms Ferdinand's present condition has been explained in terms of "nemesis" by Bosola: "what a fatal judgement/ Hath fall'n upon this Ferdinand." The unhinged condition of Ferdinand's mind has made the Cardinal apprehensive, lest he should blab the Cardinal's "intelligence in the Duchess's death." The Cardinal's position becomes further complicated when Bosola appears to demand of him the fulfilment of his promise for the reward for all the evils he has done for him. The Cardinal gives a final assignment to Bosola after which the latter would be fully rewarded. That assignment is to trace Antonio who is lurking in Milan. The reason he gives for this is that he wanted his sister to get married again and Antonio's existence is coming in his way. This reasoning is patently at variance with his loud protest against a widow's re-marriage in the opening situation of the play. This atmost confirms further the Cardinal's evil designs. Bosola by now has learnt his lesson and can see through the Cardinal's destructive designs. But he has to confirm his suspicion of the extent of the Cardinal's involvement in the murder of the Duchess. Julia's lustful attraction to Bosola comes handy. Julia agrees to elicit the secret of the Cardinal's recent

melancholy.

Julia manipulates the Cardinal to profess to her -- while Bosola was overhearing it from the next room -- that it was "By my appointment, the Great Duchess of Malfi,/ And of her young children, four nights since,/were strangled."[42] But she has to pay the price for her lust with her life. The Cardinal makes her swear by the holy scripture to keep his confession a secret. The page of the book was poisoned and Julia dies. But the secret of the Cardinal has already passed on to Bosola who was at that moment eaves-dropping. Bosola, like a clever gamester, having caught the Cardinal red-handed in murder, tries to force him to pay his reward. The Cardinal has no choice but to agree to Bosola's dictates. But he wants Bosola to arrange to remove Julia's dead body to her lodging in the dark of the dead night. Before the final catastrophe overtakes the remaining three evil characters-- Ferdinand, Cardinal, Bosola-- and the other virtuous character -- Antonio, it is relevant to comment on Julia's exit from this "theatre" where evil is being presented. Her dying words are "I go/ I know not whither," which confirms her dying with a misty vision. Bosola, in spite of his "pricking of the conscience" and determination to act as an agent to divine justice, continues to feel haunted by the Duchess. He tries to efface the vision of the Duchess, which appears to him like a hanging sword of justice over his head, by invoking moral values, like penitence. But in the same scene where he sees the haunting vision of the Duchess he works assiduously for getting his reward from the Cardinal. Hence the Duchess's vision may be taken to mean as intermittent Pricking of the conscience rather than a beacon-light leading him to his mission of

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42. Ibid., p. 154.

vindicating justice. The Cardinal, too, talks of the pricking of the conscience only purfunctorily twice[43] -- "O my conscience," and "how tedious is a guilty conscience." But it is clear that this pricking is only at the verbal level and that too very weakly articulated.

Bosola does intend to save Antonio as part of his penitence for his brutally murdering the Duchess and also as part of his general design of his revenge upon the two Arragonian brothers by frustrating their mission of destroying Antonio. Thus the moral solidity of Bosola's mission to save Antonio's life is not unadulterated. A tragedy of error overtakes the final situation of the play. By mistake Bosola kills Antonio who was on his journey for reconcilement in the dark to the chamber of the Cardinal. Antonio's journey to his inevitable end was intuitively felt by him even earlier. He had said "Necessity compels me," and "Fortune hath a part in our miseries." Antonio's premonition combined with Bosola's comment on the former's death -- "we are merely the stars' tennis-balls, struck and banded/which way please them...,"[44] eventually asserts the note of some higher power which guides and controls human destiny. This is intended by the dramatist to chasten the effect of horror and men's bestiality in the world of Malfi. But it is difficult to say that the dramatist's effort in this direction has completely succeeded.

The Cardinal, like a spider, is caught in his own web. In order to avoid public knowledge of Julia's murder he had warned

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43. The Duchess of Malfi, p. 162; p. 166.

44. Ibid., p.164.

his house-hold staff not to heed any noise or cry for help during the night when he had planned the safe removal of Julia's deadbody. Bosola gives him a fatal wound, and kills Ferdinand, too. In the confused scuffle he too receives a fatal wound. As he kills Ferdinand he declares, "Now my revenge is perfect: sink, thou main cause/of my undoing!- The last part of my life/Hath done me best service."[45] This explains the confusion of motives which we mentioned earlier. Bosola's revenge has been a half-digested moral idealism. His final speech about play-acting and about the world as theatre only enlarges the dimension of the gloomy world that Webster has portrayed. The final situation of the conventional device of restoring order in a tragedy by bringing in Antonio's son "to establish this young, hopeful gentlemen/In's mother's right," is too weak to dissipate the thick gloom of the dramatic world of the play. This world is succintly summarized by Bosola in his last speech as follows:

> O, this gloomy world!
> In what a shadow, or deep pit of darkness,
> Doth womanish and fearful mankind live![46]

Antonio's vision, when he is dying, is deeply rooted in his realization of the rottenness of this world, which he has all along known only too well: "And let my son fly the courts of princes." Ferdinand dies deeply engrossed in the corruption he has always lived with: "My sister! O! there's the cause on 't:/Whether we fall by ambition, blood, or lust." The Cardinal atmost wishes to "be laid by, and never thought of." There is a hint of a higher perception in Bosola's last line-- "Mine is another voyage"-- but it remains uncertain whether his vision has much moral or divine implication.

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45. Ibid., p.170.
46. Ibid,. p.172.

C O N C L U S I O N

The foregoing analysis of Webster's two plays -- The White Devil and The Duchess of Malfi -- amply confirms that Webster was drawing his dramatic material from the contemporary world and the prevalent ethos of the time. The general collapse and topsyturvical nature of values of all kinds, which characterized the Jacobean society, find unflattering expression in the two plays. Personal, familial, religious, and social values are shown as thrown overboard. With the strong presence of Machiavellianism, personal values, such as friendship and concern for others, do not operate in the worlds of The White Devil and The Duchess of Malfi. For example, Bracciano and Flamineo can never be friendly with anybody except for expediency or self-aggrandisement. Similarly, excepting Delio, no character in The Duchess of Malfi stands for personal human values. Even the two brothers try to thrive on mutual distrust. Selfless concern for others on account of human considerations does not seem compatible with the dramatic world of the two plays.

Violence to familial values seems to be presented in a more lurid light. Four major familial diadic relational sets have been presented in the two plays -- brother and brother; brother and sister; son and mother; and husband and wife. In the analysis of the two plays we have seen that the values sustaining these relationships have been turned topsyturvical. The relationships are characterized by distrust, betrayal, and infidelity. The brother acts as a pandar in prostituting the honour of his own sister and the wife not only violates the sanctity of matrimony but also gets her husband killed. The husband instead of providing love and protection to his

wife manipulates to get her poisoned to death. The characters in the above mentioned diadic sets-- Marcello, Issabella, and Cornelia-- who are on the side of positive values, meet with death and, worse than that, madness. Even Isabella and Cornelia take the help of evil through lies, in support of whatever residual meaning life may have for them. Even though the Duchess is faithful to her husband and vice-versa, she had to take the shelter of lying and simulation to save her husband and children from the destructive machinations of her brother. Francisco's concern to preserve and protect the conventional honour of widowhood of his sister is found to be a mere cover for his unconscious incestuous involvement with his sister. This involvement has not been worked out through events of direct nature but by implication through the psychological responses of Francisco's to his sister's goings on, as well as through the heavily loaded images of sexuality that he uses for his sister. In the same play (The Duchess of Malfi) Julia is another example of matrimonial infidelity. Though less brilliant, she is a kin of Vittoria. In this world husbands, like Camillo, and wives, like Isabella, are too simple and deficient in manipulative skills to survive. And hence they are removed from the scene of life more easily. Thus the interpersonal relationships at the family level and the values sustaining life in this institution have completely collapsed.

Things are no better at the social and religious levels. The rampant evil and cankerous corruption, which have eaten up

the vitals of social existence have been mostly conveyed through the descriptions of social, religious, and political affairs by the different commentators in the two plays. As we have shown in the analysis of these commentators-- such as Cornelia, Flamineo, Antonio, and Bosola-- they are sometimes satiric commentators while other times they are participants in the action of the play. While the lustful and lecherous Bracciano is guilty of neglecting his duties as a duke, the Duchess is no less guilty in being preoccupied only with her personal amorous affair and later domestic concerns. The civic administrative pillars of the dramatic world of Webster thus seem to be craking under the pressure of lust, self-centredness, revenge, and Machiavellianism with all its evil ingredients.

The religious prop of this world is more destructive than protective of the spiritual religious concerns of the people. The pillars of religion, like Popes and Cardinals, operate more like leaders of Mafia than spiritual guidas interested in the welfare of human souls. The Pope in The White Devil acquires elevation through manipulation and always acts against religious and human values. In the famous Vittoria trial-scene the Cardinal's hypocrisy and rottenness of mind and soul have been amply brought out. The Cardinal in The Duchess of Malfi is a more advanced case of criminality. He seems to have specialized in trapping poeple through material temptation into committing crimes and then later blackmailing them. For him the holy scripture is a tool to kill people- as he does with Julia -- and instead of carrying the book of Psalms

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